

ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation: FRACTURED FRONT: GENDER,
AUTHENTICITY, AND THE REMAKING OF
THE AMERICAN LEFT AFTER WORLD WAR
TWO

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This dissertation is a study of one long-term, inherently gendered effect of the Cold War. In the immediate aftermath of World War Two, as the emerging Cold War empowered a long-standing anti-communist strain in U.S. political culture, many artists and intellectuals feared the massification of human beings communism allegedly produced. One of the tools they developed to combat this specter of massification was the discourse of authenticity. Authenticity was predicated on the belief that useful analyses of the world came only from individual thought, experience, and emotion—not existing political theories or overarching explanations. The artists and intellectuals who developed this theory argued that the expression of this individual truth was the best way to combat and prevent totalitarianism. Authenticity continued to be important to the white, left-leaning social movements of the 1960s. Through them, it fed into the identity politics of the 1970s and 1980s. I thus draw a straight line between Cold War anti-totalitarianism and identity politics.

I explore this phenomenon in a range of cultural, intellectual, and political realms, including the anti-totalitarian thought of Frankfurt School intellectuals, the Method acting of Lee Strasberg, the Beat writing of Jack Kerouac, and the New Left politics of Students for a Democratic Society. In each arena, I trace two key patterns. The first is the gendering of authenticity. The men who dominated these fields often insisted that women were too deeply tied to the conformist “mass” to be truly authentic. Women like Method actress and teacher Stella Adler, liberal feminist Betty Friedan, Beat writer Joyce Glassman Johnson, and the women’s liberationists who broke off from SDS had to fight to be included in this culture. I document their attempts to do so. Second, I argue that the connection between 1950s culture and 1960s New Left activism went far beyond a shared gender politics. The discourse of authenticity also granted special authority to the artist, who was imagined as the figure best equipped to resist the forces of massification. This belief had far-reaching effects on the relationship between cultural production and left politics, precluding the appearance of a 1930s-style “cultural front.”

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THE AMERICAN LEFT AFTER WORLD WAR TWO

By

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2012

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Acknowledgments

Dissertation writing is largely a solitary affair, but it is hardly an individual one. This project would never have been completed without the support of friends, family, colleagues, and mentors. First, I could not have hoped for a warmer or more intellectually stimulating environment than the Department of History at the University of Maryland. I was lucky to be part of a cohort of graduate students that always supported and encouraged one another. In particular, I want to thank Kim Welch and Amy Rutenberg, both brilliant scholars whose friendship made this process so much more fun. My graduate student colleagues have made my time here truly wonderful, and so it is with some sadness that I am leaving.

These feelings are also due in no small part to the enthusiasm and insight of my advisor, the indefatigable Robyn Muncy. An incisive reader, tireless cheerleader, feminist hero, and supportive friend, Robyn improved my work in countless ways. She never stopped believing in this project, and much of the credit for it belongs to her (mistakes, of course, are mine alone). Additionally, she has provided a model of teaching excellence that I hope to emulate.

Many other faculty members went above and beyond what was required of them in contributing to my intellectual development. I have a much sharper understanding of gender, for instance, thanks to the coursework and exam preparation I completed with Clare Lyons and Sonya Michel. The other members of my dissertation committee, Jonathan Auerbach, David Freund, James Gilbert, and Saverio Giovacchini, read my work with enthusiasm and provided invaluable feedback and advice. I am especially grateful to James Gilbert and Saverio Giovacchini, with whom I was lucky to become

acquainted early on in my graduate school career. Since that time, both have been unceasingly generous in devoting their time, energy, and ideas to me and my project.

This work has also benefitted from the thoughtful feedback I received from several conference presentations. I am grateful to the American Studies Association, the National Women's Studies Association, the Society for U.S. Intellectual History, the University of Pennsylvania Graduate Humanities Forum, and the University of Maryland History Graduate Student Association for the opportunity to present portions of my dissertation.

Several groups and individuals provided material support for this project. Throughout my time at the University of Maryland, the Department of History has been a generous source of funding. Special thanks in this regard go to Mary Kay Vaughan, who first secured me a funding package in her capacity as Director of Graduate Studies when I applied to the program, and David Sicilia, a great advocate for graduate students who served as Associate Director of Graduate Studies in my final years in the program and worked to find me additional funding once my package had expired. Additionally, the College of Arts and Humanities provided key resources that allowed for conference travel. I had the further good fortune to receive both a job and friendship from Peter Albert at the Samuel Gompers Papers.

I have also benefitted tremendously from the crucial support of the American Association of University Women, with whom I held an American Fellowship in the 2011-12 school year. Beyond financial support, the AAUW has provided me with an inspiring network of women who never fail to remind me of why this work is important. I am incredibly grateful.

I am also thankful for the friends and family members who welcomed me into their homes over the course of this project. Kim Welch arranged for me to stay with her sister and brother-in-law, who generously agreed to let me do so before they had even finished moving into their new Texas home! Patricia and Michael LaRocco, my aunt and uncle, graciously allowed me to use their house in New Jersey as a long-term home base while I conducted research in New York City. My grandmother, Katherine Larocco, and aunt and uncle, Kim and John Larocco, were also kind enough to let me stay with them in New Jersey.

As these acts of generosity suggest, I owe my biggest debt of gratitude to my family. Several people deserve further recognition. All four of my grandparents, Gisela and Frank Jost and Katherine and John Larocco, believed in education and instilled this belief in their children and grandchildren. I am also thankful for my brother and sister-in-law, Dan and Sarah Larocco, who have kept me laughing through countless long car rides and games of Monopoly Deal. Alex Vallejo has shown more patience throughout this entire process than any human being should have to bear. Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Dan and Gisela Larocco, for thirty years of material and emotional support, for preferring me to have ideas than to share theirs, and for first explaining the Cold War to me when I didn't understand why the people of San Francisco wouldn't tell Chekov where the nuclear vessels were. They probably did not know that the seeds were being planted for what would eventually become my dissertation.

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Introduction

Nearly twenty years after the implosion of the New Left group, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), Lee Strasberg, director and American architect of Method acting, felt that he had come to understand something of that group's motivations. "It seems to me," he wrote,

...that a good deal of the widespread student disturbances at colleges and universities a few years ago (and which still continue to "simmer") were the result not only of social and political differences of opinion, but were also based on the students' feeling that the knowledge they were acquiring did not leave room for their individual experience, and therefore did not prepare them for the actual process of living. Technical and scientific education has made great strides on a mass level, and that is essential for meeting the demands of our industrialized world. This kind of knowledge, however, tends to make people feel more and more like atoms—as mere cogs in an enormous wheel in which human will, desire, and feelings are irrelevant.¹

Although relatively apolitical himself, Strasberg was no stranger to the American left. Indeed, as a founding member of the Group Theatre, where Communist Party members were not unusual and its sympathetic allies abounded, the director spent the years between 1931 and 1940 at the very center of Popular Front radicalism.² But the *New Left*, as Strasberg saw it, was something quite different from what he had witnessed in the 1930s, and this difference had to do with the centrality of personal emotion and

¹Lee Strasberg, *A Dream of Passion: The Development of the Method* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988), 200.

² On the Group Theatre and 1930s politics, see Wendy Smith, *Real-Life Drama: The Group Theatre and America, 1931-1940* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990). In this dissertation, I rely on Michael Denning's capacious definition of the Popular Front. Denning has challenged earlier models of the movement that have "seen it through a core-periphery model, in which the core was the Communist Party and the periphery was the surrounding circles of 'fellow travelers' with greater or lesser degrees of affiliation to the Party." Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 1997), xviii.

experience—what I call authenticity. Strasberg understood that the New Left worldview resonated more with the *aesthetic* he had popularized through the Actors' Studio than it did with the *politics* of the many committed leftists in the Group, and he was to a large extent correct. How had this come to be?

This dissertation answers that question. It argues that the commitment to authenticity that Strasberg saw in the white New Left was a legacy from the very Cold War culture the New Left claimed to reject. In the immediate aftermath of World War Two, as the emerging Cold War empowered a long-standing anti-communist strain in U.S. political culture, many artists and intellectuals identified authentic, individual experience and emotion as an antidote to the massification of human beings communism allegedly produced. Equally opposed to massification, whether by fascism, communism, or corporate power, the white New Left of the 1960s absorbed the Cold War commitment to authenticity. In turn, the New Left bequeathed their commitment to authenticity to the women's liberation movement, and through it to the identity politics that altered the landscape of American politics in the 1970s and 1980s. While identity politics had many variants and many sources, one of its roots lay deep in the Cold War culture it explicitly aimed to supplant. In tracing one of many genealogies of identity politics, I draw a straight line connecting Cold War fears of massification, the white, left-leaning social movements of the 1960s, and the identity politics they spawned.

These connections between Cold War culture and identity politics are perhaps not the most surprising revelation of my dissertation. I also show that authenticity, one of the founding commitments of the women's liberation movement, functioned throughout the postwar era as a fundamentally gendered discourse aimed at excluding women, who were

seen as too deeply imbricated in the conformist tendencies of mass society to produce any authentic experiences or analyses of the world. This dissertation demonstrates the point by analyzing the importance of authenticity among the men who dominated Method acting, Beat writing, and New Left politics. It also documents the repeated attempts of women to write themselves into the culture of authenticity, a process that culminated in the women's liberation movement.

Finally, I analyze the relationship between art and politics in the long postwar history of authenticity and, in doing so, explain why the white social movements of the New Left did not produce the sort of cultural front cultivated by the Old Left. The discourse of authenticity as it developed in the Cold War era was predicated on the belief that artists were particularly capable of preserving and expressing their true, authentic selves and thus were useful models for all who hoped to resist the massification imagined to result from communism, fascism or corporate control of American life. However, the focus on authenticity meant that didactic political art, a key aspect of 1930s left activism, would be anathema to the early New Left. Indeed, because it seemed to express a prefabricated ideology rather than a true individual self, didactic political art was seen as inherently totalitarian. I argue that the centrality of authenticity to the white New Left thus precluded the development of a cultural front in the 1960s.³

The story of how Cold War authenticity helped to produce identity politics began in the years during and after World War Two with attempts to explain, and in the future prevent, fascism. Fascism's theoretical contours were most thoroughly explicated by a group of intellectuals who had experienced European fascism firsthand and who were

³ On the cultural front, see Denning.

developing what eventually coalesced into a theory of totalitarianism. These thinkers argued that, at its most fundamental level, totalitarianism deprived individuals of authentic selves. Rejecting all overarching theories and ideologies as mechanical, incipiently totalitarian impositions on the individual, these thinkers argued that the *only* kind of truth capable of preventing fascism was one that emanated from a person's deepest thoughts, feelings, and experiences. This rejection of all systematic and ideological explanations of the world in favor of individual experience as the only bastion of truth was the essence of what I call authenticity. In this view, each individual possessed the ability to make sense of the world based on the evidence gleaned from her or his own life. Authenticity thus privileged the self, the unique, idiosyncratic being inside each person, over the groups to which this self might belong—*especially* classes. Basing one's identity on membership in the proletarian or populist "masses," for instance, was perceived as giving up one's claims to authentic, individual selfhood. Indeed, this theory held the masses themselves at least in part responsible for fascism. Yet, the resulting emphasis on individuality did not imply or demand a rugged individualism, as the more subtle of the intellectuals, artists, and activists who drew on these ideas and are discussed here insisted that individuality and mutuality were compatible, even interdependent. Moreover, they distinguished between the face-to-face socialization that occurred at the level of family and community and the alienation from the individual self that took place in social relations produced by capitalist production and mass society. The former did not necessarily threaten the individual's claims to authenticity, but the latter made such claims impossible.

In this dissertation, I use “authenticity” as a historical concept, one that was often deployed in ways that failed to live up to its democratic, egalitarian potential. My goal, however, is not to condemn those who found authenticity a useful tool for advancing their political agendas. This project grew out of my own feminist politics, particularly my interest in the debate between essentialism and gender deconstruction. This debate, which peaked in the 1980s but continues to influence feminist scholarship today, pits two very different conceptions of selfhood against each other. In the cultural feminism of the 1970s, for instance, essentialism manifested itself as a quest to reclaim a “true” female experience unmarred by the manipulations of patriarchy. By contrast, the gender deconstruction of such theorists as Judith Butler held not only that the self was manipulated by social forces, but also that the very existence of the self was a myth.⁴ At first glance, authenticity seems to be more in line with essentialism. Such was not really the case, however. Indeed, the groups and individuals I discuss conceived of identity in ways that trouble this binary. While they certainly did not go so far as to insist that the existence of the self was a myth, they had no trouble conceptualizing their identities as *both* the result of their socialization *and* real or authentic. Moreover, they believed that the external expression of these identities could reveal the forces that shaped people’s lives, laying bare the deleterious effects of capitalism, racism, and patriarchy. In revealing how power works, authenticity can indeed be a powerful tool for those who wish to advance a leftist or progressive political agenda. As such, its history deserves to be fully studied and understood, for it is both an inspirational and a cautionary tale.

⁴ See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990; repr., New York: Routledge, 1999).

Postwar Americans themselves did not need to look far to find ample evidence of what could happen when authenticity was deployed to serve racist, imperialist, or authoritarian regimes. Because it implied the existence of *inauthenticity*, claiming authenticity could be an exclusionary process that drew stark boundaries between those whose truth counted and those whose did not—precisely what, at its extremes, had occurred in the nations from which Americans sought to differentiate themselves. After World War Two, for many in the West fears of Nazi Germany shifted to the Stalinist Soviet Union, and fascism and communism melded in the broader, more diffuse threat of “totalitarianism.” Authenticity functioned as an antidote to this new threat as it had to the older one, and, as the Cold War intensified, authenticity became a widespread cultural phenomenon put in the service of fighting communism. By the 1950s, Americans were using “fascism” and the more common term “totalitarianism” interchangeably, suggesting not only the degree to which Germany and the Soviet Union, but also communism and fascism, had merged in the minds of many.

At the same time, some Americans in the 1950s conceived of totalitarianism not as a distant threat from a foreign nation, but as something that needed to be prevented and/or rooted out *in America*. In order to prevent the United States from falling to totalitarianism, “masses,” a catch-all term used in the 1950s to denote those who had given up their individuality, needed to become authentic selves. As cultural theorist Andrew Ross has noted, “mass” was “one of the key terms that govern[ed]...the official distinction between American/Un-American, or inside/outside.”⁵ Americans of various political ideologies agreed that one group particularly afflicted by this herd-like mindset was the Old Left of the 1930s, a movement with a sizeable contingent of both Communist

⁵ Andrew Ross, *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 42.

Party members and devoted allies. The mass culture produced by bureaucratic, corporate America was another potential massifying agent according to some 1950s thinkers, and it was the one most explicitly feared and rejected by the New Left in the 1960s. However, by insisting on authenticity as the bulwark against 1950s conformity, New Left activists distanced themselves not only from corporate capitalism and mass culture but also from the Old Left. 1960s radicals found a language of authenticity developed to fight communism equally useful to describe and resist the massification wrought by unbridled corporate capitalism. Thus, while they certainly defined themselves in opposition to a conformity they associated with 1950s Cold War culture, New Left members also absorbed certain elements of Cold War culture.

In this dissertation, I use Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), the New Left organization best known for its theory of participatory democracy and its opposition to the Vietnam War, to illustrate the continued relevance of authenticity to the 1960s. To members of SDS, the Old Left of the Popular Front seemed quaint, ineffective, and even conservative. However, another fear lay underneath this dismissal. In its loyalty to systematic explanations of the world, New Leftists argued, the earlier movement denied individuals the right to determine and express their own truths, turning them into mechanical mouthpieces of rigid ideologies. As Michael Kazin has recently noted, “sturdy organizations, with their bureaucracies and fixed doctrines, were part of the System they [New Leftists] were trying to abolish.”⁶ Only when people were able to cast off false values and express their true selves, these young radicals believed, could they resist massification and implement a participatory democracy.

⁶Michael Kazin, *American Dreamers: How the Left Changed a Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011), 211.

Historians have long known that the Cold War remade the American left. While the political climate after World War Two put the left on the defensive, specific events also made a reclamation of the Popular Front untenable. According to Kazin, 1956, when Nikita Khrushchev revealed the extent of the atrocities committed by former Soviet leader Josef Stalin and then crushed the democratic socialist revolution in Hungary, was a point of no return. In order to emerge as a viable force in American politics, a new left had to disassociate itself from the Communist Party.⁷ My work adds to our understanding of how it did so, revealing that the New Left made the Cold War's anti-totalitarian concepts of authenticity and the primacy of the individual self absolutely central to their worldview.

My project does not trace the full history of authenticity in American culture and politics.⁸ In its emphasis on the self, postwar authenticity bore much in common with transcendentalism, certain aspects of Freudianism, and segments of the pre-World War One left. In his celebration of youth and individuality, journalist Randolph Bourne condemned the tendency of “societies...[to] demand a close mechanical similarity, and a conformity to a reactionary and not a progressive type.”⁹ He encouraged his readers to reject the “inexhaustible store of ready-made ideas,” the “predigested nourishment” of conventional knowledge.¹⁰ Life, he argued, was best understood as a series of

⁷ Ibid., 210-11. Kazin also notes that 1956 marked the publications of C. Wright Mills's *The Power Elite* and Allen Ginsberg's *Howl*, both of which influenced the New Left.

⁸ As Marshall Berman has pointed out, an international concern with authenticity dates back at least to the Enlightenment. Marshall Berman, *The Politics of Authenticity: Radical Individualism and the Emergence of Modern Society* (New York: Atheneum, 1970).

⁹ Randolph S. Bourne, *Youth and Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1913), 284.

¹⁰ Ibid., 112.

“experiments in living” out of which the only true knowledge came.¹¹ Similarly, the “modernist radicals” in the orbit of journalist Max Eastman’s the *Masses* “linked social change to personal liberation.”¹² In their emphasis on liberating the self from both arbitrary, restrictive customs and the dehumanizing nature of wage work, early-twentieth-century radicals anticipated many of the demands of the New Left. Also like the New Left, members of this movement insisted, in the words of the *Masses*, on freedom from “rigidity and dogma wherever it is found.”¹³

Even as this vibrant early-twentieth-century left was decimated after World War One, a concern with authenticity persisted into the 1920s and beyond, in, for example, the work of F. Scott Fitzgerald, where distinguishing between true and false selves was a frequent theme. The 1930s celebration of folk culture also represented a kind of search for authenticity. Acknowledging this longer history, I focus on the 1940s and 1950s, arguing that authenticity took on urgency and power at that point as an antidote to the perceived repressive conformity of totalitarianism, represented most importantly by the Soviet Union.

There were, moreover, important differences between pre- and post-World War Two understandings of authenticity, and these differences make the postwar era a cohesive period demanding its own study. Popular Front culture and politics did not put the same emphasis on the individual self as did later left-leaning social movements. Rather, cultural front activists aimed to speak both for and to “the masses” or “the

¹¹ Ibid., 244-5.

¹² Kazin, xix.

¹³ Quoted in Christine Stansell, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000), 171.

people,” a group imagined to embody a set of common, class-based interests. As historian Michael Denning has argued of the cultural wing of the 1930s left, “‘the people’ became the central trope of left culture in this period, the imagined ground of political and cultural activity, the rhetorical stake in ideological battle. The cultural front imagined itself as a ‘people’s culture.’”¹⁴ Of course, Old Left members were quite well aware that individual emotions and experiences existed, but their politics did not usually begin there, and they valued rather than condemned the masses.

Meanwhile, the early-twentieth-century left’s preoccupation with the dehumanizing nature of wage work, not to mention less explicitly political concerns about neurasthenia and “overcivilization,” certainly had an analogue in 1950s worries about the “man in the gray flannel suit,” a middle-class man whose only identity derived from his position on the corporate ladder.¹⁵ Yet, these related concerns also point to era-defining differences. In the early twentieth century, up to and including the 1930s, authenticity was a concern of some communities within the left, but it was not necessarily defining. Moreover, as postwar Americans understood the particular version of authenticity I describe in direct contrast to mass culture and fascism, it cannot be read back onto an era in which these forms did not exist. Despite the existence of earlier, similar forms of authenticity, postwar Americans, including New Left members, were also deeply invested in the belief that their situations and ideas were new and different.

¹⁴ Denning, 124.

¹⁵ On neurasthenia and overcivilization, see Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). On the man in the gray flannel suit, see Sloan Wilson, *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1955); C. Wright Mills, *White Collar: The American Middle Classes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953); David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950); William H. Whyte, Jr., *The Organization Man* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1950). Mills, of course, went on to influence the New Left.

While concerns about what mass society in all of its forms was doing to human beings began before the 1940s, primarily among leftists and Progressives, it was after the war that such concerns became widespread, dramatically overflowing the banks of the left. This dissertation focuses on cultural and intellectual responses to the Cold War, but there were many reasons why this occurred. First, not everyone welcomed the developments associated with the “affluent society.” While this postwar economic boom did materially improve the lives of many, its critics charged that it led to conformity. I count the groups and individuals discussed in this study among these critics.

As noted above, the changing nature of work in a corporate capitalist society made many white, middle-class men fear that they had lost their identities. These fears developed alongside an explosion of suburbanization, accomplished in part through mass production building techniques. The resulting, nearly identical houses were filled with nearly identical mass-produced consumer goods. After the deprivation of the Great Depression and the rationing of the war years, Americans were in a mood to spend—and both government policies and corporate admonitions encouraged them to base their identities on this consumption.

Critics found these developments alarming enough on their own. They were also compounded by a terrifying international situation. The development and deployment of the atomic bomb led many Americans to fear that technology had begun to control humanity, rather than the other way around. At the same time, the horrors of the Holocaust stood as the ultimate debasement of human dignity and individuality. How could one continue to be a human being in a world where identities could so easily be reduced to numbers or obliterated altogether? Such fears also fed into alarm directed at

the Soviet Union, “red” China, and the “brainwashing” of American soldiers during the Korean War.

Together, developments related to work, suburbanization, consumer culture, technology, and war led to mainstream concern over the preservation of individuality. My study thus picks up the story at a point where authenticity seemed more urgent than ever to a broad spectrum of Americans and a point where it had been wrenched from earlier, key attachments to the political left. Indeed, my work on 1950s culture reveals that maintaining boundaries between the authentic individual and the inauthentic mass was a pervasive concern among postwar Americans of various, competing political stripes. In making authenticity once again a central focus, the New Left drew on a broad culture that did not always share its political commitments and an intellectual tradition hostile to collective, or “mass,” struggle in the interest of democracy and equality.

Beyond these chronological boundaries, this dissertation includes thematic limitations. In choosing to explore three case studies—Method acting, Beat writing, and the New Left politics of Students for a Democratic Society and its feminist offshoots—I have inevitably left much out. For instance, while my work is informed by international politics, I have not fully explored the importance of authenticity to existentialism or anti-colonialism. In the context of American culture, I do not venture into the fields of visual art or music, which means that abstract expressionism, pop art, the experimental compositions of John Cage, and the folk songs of Bob Dylan and Joan Baez are absent.

One omission deserves fuller elaboration. While carefully attuned to the ways in which authenticity was deployed to support racist ideologies and practices, this dissertation does not explore the importance of authenticity to the civil rights movement

itself. Longtime civil rights activist Ella Baker, for instance, encouraged the young activists in the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) not to impose their own ideas and solutions on poor, rural African Americans, but rather to learn from the lived experiences of local people. Further research will be needed in order to limn these connections more fully.

Keeping these omissions in mind, it is important to point out that the genealogy I chart is only one slice of a much broader explanation for the emergence of identity politics. By identity politics, I refer to the set of beliefs that came to dominate much of the political discussion in this country at the end of the twentieth century. Based on the assumption that members of a group shared a common set of interests, identity politics at first glance appears irreconcilable with authenticity. Yet, my work makes the surprising discovery that, at least in certain cases, the recognition of individual experience and emotion predated and fed into an understanding of shared group interests. Thus, it is important to understand how and why individual experience and emotion were so privileged in the postwar United States.

In identifying a shared commitment to authenticity, I have found ample evidence demonstrating continuities among the conception of the self in Cold War culture, the white New Left, and the emergence of identity politics. In addition, the specific contribution that my dissertation makes to what historians already know about the left and the Cold War lies in the important stories I tell about gender and culture. Earlier histories have noted the centrality of authenticity to the thinking of the New Left. However, because they exclude the 1940s and 1950s, those earlier histories have not understood that as it emerged into early postwar culture, authenticity was a

fundamentally gendered concept available only to certain groups of men. Variations on this pattern existed throughout postwar culture; as noted above, those analyzed in this dissertation include Method acting, Beat writing, and New Left politics. Drawing on women's association with consumption, mainstream intellectuals often interpreted "mass culture" as feminine, linking forms as seemingly innocuous as "middlebrow" women's fiction and popular films to the production of personality traits linked to totalitarianism.¹⁶ Countercultural Beat writers, who often avoided waged work, saw women as too deeply entwined in the concerns of daily life—not only paid work, but also childrearing and domestic labor—to transcend the repressive forces of conformity.¹⁷ The federal government accidentally contributed to this gender divide through its generous G.I. Bill policies, which allowed (mostly male) veterans to go "on the road" in search of authentic experience or to take classes at such institutions as the Actors Studio, where the goal was freedom from mechanical habits and behaviors. Even the women who overcame these material inequalities faced ideological burdens. Women who wanted to be writers, such as Joyce Glassman Johnson, were frequently told that their life experiences were too narrow to produce authentic art, while those who studied Method acting at the Actors Studio learned that they could only be real artists if they were willing both to identify with a limited cast of characters who lacked agency and to re-live similar and/or deeply

¹⁶ See Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White, ed., *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America* (New York: The Free Press, 1957).

¹⁷ As Andreas Huyssen has argued, "the political, psychological, and aesthetic discourse around the turn of the century consistently and obsessively gendered mass culture and the masses as feminine, while high culture, whether traditional or modern, clearly remains the privileged realm of male activities." Vestiges of this "inscription of the feminine on the notion of mass culture... did not relinquish its hold" in the 1940s and 1950s, "even among those critics," including Frankfurt School theorists Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and Siegfried Kracauer, "who did much to overcome the 19th century mystification of mass culture as woman." In contrast to feminized, "inauthentic" mass culture, supposedly autonomous, "genuine" art that managed to escape from the clutches of commodification and massification was implicitly gendered male. Andreas Huyssen, "Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism's Other," in Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 47.

traumatic and embarrassing moments from their own lives. Method acting guru Lee Strasberg, moreover, perceived no conflict in apotheosizing individual truth while simultaneously insisting to actresses that what they perceived as their individual truths were merely mannerisms.

Carrying on this line of thinking, New Left theorists in the 1960s argued that “the masses,” often represented by women as consumers, were incapable of the individual thought participatory democracy required, and they were quick to dismiss women’s own concerns as apolitical. In theory a gender-neutral, even egalitarian, concept that equally valued each person’s voice, authenticity functioned quite differently in practice, where deep and sincere commitments to individual truth extended only so far as other men. Distinguishing between true and false interpretations of reality became a prerogative of masculinity in which women’s claims to truth were easily rejected as inauthentic vestiges of false consciousness.

But a generation of artist and activist women refused to accept their unequal access to authenticity, and I document their ongoing efforts to write themselves into this culture. I chart the attempts of actress and teacher Stella Adler to develop an alternative form of Method acting not dependent on reliving traumatic experiences. In so doing, her work paralleled Betty Friedan’s attempts to apply self-actualization theory to women. As both were involved in Popular Front activism during the 1930s and 1940s, Adler and Friedan also show how members of this earlier movement contributed to the changing discourse of the left. I also analyze the attempts of women writers including Joyce Glassman Johnson, Hettie Jones, Diane DiPrima, and Anne Roiphe to challenge the assumptions of countercultural Beat men that only certain experiences were usable bases

for the creation of art. Finally, I explore the ways in which women's liberationists both drew on and refashioned the insistent humanism of the early SDS, using their own experiences and emotions to develop a structural critique of gender relations. By the late 1960s, SDS men had descended into a frenzy of theorizing mania and rigid dogmatism, and the women's liberationists who broke off from the organization criticized it on the same grounds that their male counterparts had criticized the Old Left. No existing theories, women argued, could explain the realities of their lives.

Culture and politics did not merely run on parallel tracks with similar gender politics in the years following World War Two. Rather, my work also makes the key discovery that it is impossible to understand New Leftists' conception of authenticity without recognizing its dependence on culture, performance, and the arts. New Leftists believed that living authentically and living like an artist were one and the same. Like the architects of anti-totalitarian theory, they believed that artists, as people trained to express their authentic selves, were peculiarly well-positioned to resist the repressive conformity that led to totalitarianism. In the battle between individuality and freedom on the one hand and massification and totalitarianism on the other, all people would thus do well to emulate the expressivity and spontaneity of the artist. New Leftists perceived authenticity, that is, not as an internal state of quiet contemplation, but as a quality that needed to be expressed. It demanded to be performed, and it demanded an audience. At its deepest level, authenticity meant performing one's true self.

New Leftists' investment in authenticity, I argue, also precluded the appearance of a cultural front of politically didactic art in the 1960s. As beautifully defined and analyzed by Denning, the Old Left produced in the 1930s what he calls a "cultural front"

consisting of “the extraordinary flowering of arts, entertainment, and thought based on the broad social movement that came to be known as the Popular Front.”¹⁸ The cultural front consisted of much more than simply the art produced by artists with a leftist “cultural politics”; it also depended on certain “aesthetic ideologies”—the manifestation of a class-based politics in the very form of the artwork.¹⁹ By contrast, the usefulness of artists to the New Left depended fundamentally on artists’ perceived ability to express their true selves, which would be threatened were they turned into mere mouthpieces for various ideological positions. In this way, 1960s radicals echoed such thinkers as Theodor Adorno, who saw the creation of authentic art as the apotheosis of individuality.²⁰ The prevailing influence on the New Left of Adorno, other Frankfurt School intellectuals, and American anti-Stalinist intellectuals led its members to see explicitly political art as itself incipiently totalitarian.

This is not to say that there was no political art in the 1960s. SDS itself sponsored a short-lived literary magazine, *Caw!*, that included poetry, personal essays, treatises on Brechtian theatre, and discussions of the Black Arts Movement alongside writings on Cuba, Vietnam, and American consumer capitalism. Within the organization, some hoped to establish a successor to the New Deal’s Federal Theatre Project under the auspices of the Economic Research and Action Project (ERAP). The failure of these stirrings to coalesce into a broader cultural wing also did not prevent those primarily

¹⁸ Denning, xvi.

¹⁹ Denning defines “cultural politics” as “the politics of allegiances and affiliations” and “aesthetic ideologies” as “the politics of form.” Ibid., xix.

²⁰ See, for instance, Theodor Adorno, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J.M. Bernstein (New York: Routledge, 1991).

trained as artists from putting their talents to political uses, as in the anti-Vietnam War parades of Peter Schumann's Bread and Puppet Theatre.²¹

The relationship between culture and left-wing politics changed significantly between the 1930s and the 1960s, however. First, the relationship between culture and the state had changed. With exceptions such as the 1965 establishment of the National Endowment for the Arts, the Great Society was less interested in sponsoring cultural production than the New Deal had been. The federal government, however, remained involved in this field in less direct ways, primarily, I argue, through the G.I. Bill. As Denning has argued, the expansion of higher education under the G.I. Bill resulted in an audience with different expectations for their cultural consumption.²² These policies also affected cultural producers, who received funding as individuals rather than as members of a group. This funding provided one more way in which the generous support provided especially to white, male World War Two veterans was obscured, allowing such men to imagine themselves as autonomous, independent individuals who had never received aid from the government. While the 1930s relationship between cultural production and the state encouraged feelings of collectivity and mutual dependency, the postwar relationship emphasized individuality and, at times, a mythical rugged individualism.

²¹ At first glance, the Bread and Puppet Theatre appears as an exception to the pattern presented here, both for its explicitly political nature and its reliance on masks, puppets, and other forms of artifice. Yet, its founder, the German-born Peter Schumann, actually shared many ideas with the artists, activists, and intellectuals discussed in this dissertation. Despite his pessimism regarding humanity's goodness, Schumann believed that, at their core, each individual had a pure, childlike nature that could be reached through art. He found puppetry, itself a children's art form, the most promising way to reach this innocent inner core. Furthermore, while the artificial nature of puppetry and masks may seem like the opposite of authenticity, it was not. Putting a spin on Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*, in which the strangeness of theatre led audience members to think critically about the outside world, Schumann believed that masked theatre would force people to become cognizant of the masks they wore in real life and encourage them to live with greater authenticity. Stefan Brecht, *Peter Schumann's Bread and Puppet Theatre*, vol. 1 (London: Methuen, 1988), 22, 310.

²² Denning, 44-6.

Intellectually, the 1960s left imagined fundamentally different relationships among the cultural producer, the cultural product, and the audience. Unlike the 1930s left, which aimed to speak both for and to “the masses” or “the people,” 1960s leftists imagined themselves speaking both for and to individuals. One of the goals of this dissertation is to show how and why this transformation took place, linking it to the fear and suspicion of “the masses” that emerged most forcefully after World War Two. As historian Ellen Schrecker has argued about postwar visual artists, “instead of toeing a party line and trying to reach the masses, these artists turned inward, using their painting in highly individualistic ways.”²³ Historian Saverio Giovacchini has further pointed out that this re-assessment of the masses resulted from debates over the role of the German people *vis-à-vis* Nazism, supplanting earlier Popular Front and wartime assumptions that the masses were fundamentally good.²⁴ The onset of the Cold War and the melding of German fascism and Soviet communism further encouraged these tendencies. Thus, while it made sense to both John Howard Lawson in the 1920s and 1930s and Tennessee Williams in the 1950s and early 1960s to argue that theatre was more politically important for the emotions it elicited in the audience than the messages it delivered, they imagined this audience quite differently. For Lawson, connecting with the masses was precisely the point. For Williams, this was simply unthinkable. As I argue in chapter two, he insisted that he did not “want to tell ‘the world’ anything...I want to tell a person,

²³ Ellen Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1998), 402.

²⁴ Saverio Giovacchini, *Hollywood Modernism: Film and Politics in the Age of the New Deal* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001).

or persons, something.”²⁵ Along with the other artists and activists discussed in this dissertation, Williams believed that communication between individuals staved off the fascist or totalitarian inclinations of the masses. In many ways, then, my work picks up the chronology where Giovacchini leaves off.²⁶

The artist was an important symbol to the left throughout the twentieth century, with “living like an artist” often serving as a rhetorical stand-in or shorthand for its members’ political goals. However, the left’s understanding of what it meant to live like an artist changed significantly between the first and second halves of the twentieth century. As historian Christine Stansell has pointed out, the last words of International Workers of the World martyr Joe Hill upon his 1915 execution were, “I have lived like an artist, and I shall die like an artist.”²⁷ Similarly, Denning has argued, following cultural theorist Raymond Williams, that the cultural front drew on “the Romantic notion of the artist as the epitome of the free individual, and it viewed the politics of art as an individual act, an almost heroic choice.”²⁸ New Left members, too, hoped to live like artists, and they also imagined the artist as the apotheosis of individuality. As will be discussed in chapters five and seven, they aimed to “follow the lead of those who are imaginative, truly radical and sensitive, the artist, writer, musician, and poet,” to “build their lives as if they were creating art.”²⁹ However, there were important differences: to

²⁵ Tennessee Williams to Cheryl Crawford, May 20, 1960, folder 2.39, Cheryl Crawford Papers, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

²⁶ On Lawson, see Giovacchini, especially 21, 131-2.

²⁷ Quoted in Stansell, 151.

²⁸ Denning, 56.

²⁹ Rich Horevitz to Carolyn Craven, July 28, 1965, series 2A, no. 42, Students for a Democratic Society Papers (Glen Rock, N.J.: Microfilming Corp. of America, 1977).

early-twentieth-century leftists like Hill and 1930s cultural front members, living like an artist meant expressing a political position. By the 1960s, many leftists believed it meant expressing the individual self. Untethered from the requirement to stake out and express explicitly political positions, self-expression itself became the political gesture.³⁰

New Left members did show some interest in the experiential knowledge gleaned from artistic production, which I discuss in chapters five and seven. For the most part, though, their interest in living like an artist was untethered not only from politics, but also from the creation of *actual art*.³¹ They understood the artist as a sociological category: a person who, because he (and it *was* he) possessed an imagined lack of responsibility to anyone or anything, including dehumanizing labor, familial obligations, and a political line, was free. As a sociological category, then, “the artist” was both inherently male and inherently apolitical—and therein lay much of his appeal. New Left members contrasted the lack of freedom they felt in their own lives with a mythical category of persons who had somehow escaped from this unfreedom. Thus, artists play two different roles in this dissertation: both those who produced actual art, particularly theatre artists and fiction writers, and the category of individuals imagined to be free.

One of the underlying assumptions of this dissertation is that culture and politics, or ideas and material lives, are deeply intertwined. In exploring these connections, I

³⁰ Certainly there were exceptions to these patterns. In 1934, Max Eastman wrote two treatises, *Art and the Life of Action* and *Artists in Uniform*, that condemned utilitarian art. However, he did so as a person already disillusioned with the Soviet Union, a disillusionment that eventually led him to embrace right-wing causes. By contrast, Eastman’s biographer, William O’Neill, has pointed out that Eastman’s tenure at the *Masses* was characterized by a dual focus on “art and the revolution, which in those days everyone thought went together.” See Max Eastman, *Art and the Life of Action with Other Essays*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1934); Eastman, *Artists in Uniform* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1934); William L. O’Neill, *The Last Romantic: A Life of Max Eastman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 40.

³¹ My argument here is limited to the self-identified political left. The 1960s also included a flourishing counterculture that at times intersected with, but was not the same as, this political movement.

make several historical and theoretical contributions to our understanding of how culture works. The specific sites I explore clearly show how the culture of the 1950s, itself a grappling with larger national and international political concerns, animated and influenced the social movements of the 1960s. In turn, these social movements affected several aspects of American life, including citizenship rights, education, and, perhaps most crucially, relations between men and women. These social movements also altered the terms of political debate in this country, as reactions against them fed into the culture wars of the final two decades of the twentieth century. Elite, white men perceived themselves as under attack by marginalized people's attempts to have their voices heard. In response, they reasserted their own hegemony through attacks on feminism, multiculturalism, and other challenges to conventional authority. My work thus sheds new light on how and why these political transformations took place, arguing that cultural and intellectual developments in the immediate postwar era provide a crucial part of the explanation. More broadly, my work shows that culture has the power to affect both political discourse and people's material lives. Much more than entertainment, culture provides people with a shared language, a way to frame their understanding of the world and their place in it. As my dissertation shows, it can also give people the tools to *challenge* their place in the world.

Historiography

I am not the first historian to note the importance of authenticity to SDS, the 1960s, or identity politics, and I am indebted to the compelling work already done by James Miller, Todd Gitlin, Doug Rossinow, David Barber, and Howard Brick. Himself a

former SDS member, Miller's *Democracy Is in the Streets*, for instance, includes not only a chapter titled "an organizer in search of authenticity" (on early member Sharon Jeffrey, who most distinguished herself through leadership of the Cleveland Economic Research and Action Project), but also an acknowledgment that Tom Hayden, the SDS leader responsible for drafting the organization's 1962 manifesto, the Port Huron Statement, was deeply influenced by both *The Catcher in the Rye*'s railings against phoniness and Jack Kerouac's emphasis on experience.³² A term that was difficult to define and even, according to Sharon Jeffrey, one that tended to be dismissed and scorned, authenticity was nonetheless a salient concept to the organization. Although, as Miller points out, its meaning was never explained in the Port Huron Statement itself, Hayden elsewhere defined authenticity as "genuine independence," "an intuitive alertness to that which is capable of occurring, to that which is not yet realized, and a passion for the continuous opening of human potential." Dick Flacks, who would make significant contributions to a 1963 follow-up to the Port Huron Statement, insisted that authenticity was better defined as an "acute sensitivity to hypocrisy, a wish for self-knowledge and understanding, concern that one's own personal potentialities—as well as those of others—be realized, rejection of imposed standards of behavior, and acceptance of situational ethics."³³

Writing in the same year as Miller, 1987, Todd Gitlin, SDS president in 1963-4, similarly noted the connections between the 1960s student left and the anti-conformist intellectuals and artists of the previous decade, an insight with gendered and cultural

³² Beyond phoniness, *The Catcher in the Rye* also bore two other important commonalities to New Left thought: the celebration of youth and the condemnation of mass culture.

³³ Quoted in James Miller, "*Democracy Is in the Streets*": *From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 205.

implications that my work is the first to document and fully analyze. “With left-wing politics in a state of collapse” during the McCarthy era, he noted, the most important “oppositional spaces” providing links between Old and New Lefts “were cultural—ways of living, thinking, and fighting oneself free of the affluent consensus.” According to Gitlin, the most important of these links were the Beats, including Jack Kerouac, who attacked the institution of higher education for “being nothing but grooming schools for the middle class non-identity...rows of well-to-do houses with lawns and TV sets in each living room with everybody looking at the same thing.”³⁴ Weaving memory with history, Gitlin also recalled that what particularly appealed to him about SDS was its expressivity, especially in contrast to the perceived rigidity of the Old Left. “They [SDS members] lived as if life mattered profoundly,” he wrote, “as if—this is hard to say without sounding mawkish, yet it seemed this way at the time—as if you could actually take life in your hands and live it deliberately, as if it were an artwork.”³⁵ Young people in the movement, he went on to argue, mounted

a living protest against both isolation and fragmentation. There was a longing to “unite the fragmented parts of personal history,” as *The Port Huron Statement* put it—to transcend the multiplicity and confusion of roles that become normal in a rationalized society: the rifts between work and family, between public and private, between strategic, calculating reason and spontaneous, expressive emotion.³⁶

³⁴ Jack Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums*, quoted in Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam, 1987), 49.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 106.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 107.

In other words, what SDS offered to an idealistic, earnest young person like Todd Gitlin was not only a chance to effect the *political* change he saw was so desperately needed, but also the promise of *personal* transformation through the expression of one's true self.

The historian who has most thoroughly analyzed the importance of authenticity to SDS's thought is Doug Rossinow, whose masterful study, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America*, connects these concerns to the influence of Christian existentialism. Particularly compelling when tracing the life histories of such important early SDSers as Tom and Casey Hayden, Rossinow's work runs along a path parallel to my own. However, while one of his goals is to contextualize the New Left within "a tradition of existentialist politics in these middle strata in cold war America," this focus on Christian existentialism largely obscures not only fears of mechanization and conformity, but also the political materialities that motivated these fears. Existentialism indeed contributed a great deal to the discourse of authenticity. Yet, without attention to the desperate need these thinkers felt to find something—anything—with the power to stave off totalitarianism, it is impossible to understand how and why authenticity had such appeal. Otherwise carefully attuned to the gendered ramifications of authenticity, Rossinow also does not pursue a line of thought that would allow for its gendered *heritage* to be properly understood. Finally, although he acknowledges identity politics as a sort of denouement to the politics of authenticity, it is not his priority to analyze the importance of selfhood inherent in the concept itself.³⁷

I also construct an argument different from that made by David Barber, whose excellent study argues in direct response to Rossinow that "white students failed to see

³⁷ Doug Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 5.

themselves as authentic agents of social change because of their whiteness, their white privilege...The struggle for authenticity, at its root, was simply the struggle to comprehend and purge themselves of the lie of whiteness.” More interested in selfhood than Rossinow, Barber’s claim that SDS members believed in “a constructed, cultural self and not a ‘natural’ self” also does not comport with what my own research reveals, reading backward onto SDS members a postmodernism with which they would not have identified.³⁸

These earlier histories, while noting connections to 1950s culture and intellectual discourse and carefully acknowledging SDS men’s blindness to their own sexism, have not fully limned either these chronological linkages or the gendered assumptions behind the concept of authenticity that SDS members inherited from their predecessors. Within SDS, I argue, the concept of authenticity is best understood as a rejection of all overarching theories and analyses of the world as not only inadequate explanations of human experience but also, because they relied on mechanical answers to the world’s problems, as incipiently totalitarian. Adherents of authenticity would brook no systematic ideologies, instead positing the self, and its experiences and emotions, as the only legitimate measure of truth. Under the new definition of authenticity I advance, SDS members appear as the direct descendants of the 1950s intellectuals and artists who made the self the surest bulwark against totalitarianism. The relevance of Jewish-German intellectuals’ firsthand experiences with fascism to the development of anti-totalitarian theory, and the salience of this anti-totalitarian theory to SDS members, also suggests that their investment in authenticity cannot be exclusively attributed to Christian

³⁸ David Barber, *A Hard Rain Fell: SDS and Why It Failed* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 8-9.

existentialism. Moreover, as inheritors of the “mass culture” debates that associated women with a mass of brainless, conformist automatons who threatened to lead the U.S. into totalitarianism, SDS men also deployed authenticity in similarly gendered fashion, explicitly or implicitly leaving women (because of their perceived inauthenticity) out of their imaged utopian polity. Like their predecessors, they quickly abandoned their faith in the truth of individual experience when the views expressed conflicted with their own, arguing instead that those who expressed them must be suffering from false consciousness.

In addition to advancing a new definition of authenticity, my own work thus goes beyond earlier histories of authenticity in three ways: in revealing chronological and intellectual linkages to the anti-totalitarian discourse of the early Cold War; in tracing a long-standing pattern of gendered exclusion; and in explaining the connections between SDS members’ conception of authenticity and performance, culture, and the arts. My work also differs from these earlier histories in documenting and analyzing women’s responses to this exclusion and in explaining the absence of a cultural front in the 1960s.

In doing so, my work also draws on Howard Brick’s broader history of 1960s thought, combining in different ways the intellectual currents he identifies. Most importantly, Brick notes that the prominent 1960s resistance to systematic and ideological thought derived from a combination of “postwar liberal anticommunism and...existentialist critiques of ‘totalitarianism,’” as thinkers like Hannah Arendt, Herbert Marcuse, and Theodor Adorno associated overarching theories with the abrogation of freedom.³⁹ He also includes a discussion of authenticity, “a broader feeling that the

³⁹ Howard Brick, *Age of Contradiction: American Thought and Culture in the 1960s* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 34, 133.

obsolescence of an old social order rendered all established roles radically artificial—things a vital self might shed.”⁴⁰ However, because he does not trace anti-ideological, anti-systematic thought to its key emphasis on individual truth as a bulwark against totalitarianism, he does not make the connections *between* these two streams of thought; that is, without the key link of individual truth, he does not see that anti-totalitarianism and the pursuit of authenticity were largely one and the same. With the exceptions of Berkeley Free Speech Movement activist Mario Savio and feminists’ attempts to cast off the masks they had been forced to wear, Brick also does not discuss the resistance to ideology in, or the importance of authenticity to, the New Left.⁴¹

In addition to explicitly connecting these various strands of thought and identifying a gendered pattern in their deployment, my work also adds to Brick’s by suggesting that, for many 1960s intellectuals, activists, and artists, “performance” functioned as a useful way of reconciling the contradiction between authenticity and artifice. Brick argues that “one of the chief paradoxes of the 1960s was the coincidence of devotion to the ideal of authenticity—of discovering, voicing, and exercising a genuine, whole personality freed from the grip of mortifying convention—and fascination with the ways of artifice, with the calculated technique of image making or ‘the games people play.’”⁴² In their desire to emulate performing artists, SDS members and others not only figured performance as the *sine qua non* of authenticity, but also perceived no conflict between engaging in a certain kind of role-playing and expressing

⁴⁰ Ibid., 73.

⁴¹ Like Rossinow, however, Brick does link authenticity to Sartrean existentialism’s emphasis on action. Ibid., 15.

⁴² Ibid., 66.

their authentic selves. The New Left's reconciliation of these apparently contradictory commitments will be explained in chapter seven.

I am also not the first historian to link anti-communism to conservative gender and sexual politics. Despite the more complex picture of these years that has emerged in the past two decades, historians agree that the postwar years represented a time in which “deviant” political ideologies *or* personal life choices risked swift and severe punishment. In an era in which support for racial or gender equality was enough for someone to be branded as subversive and/or hauled before a Loyalty Board, the burgeoning Popular Front feminism that had emerged from the 1930s and 1940s left was pushed underground, where it would remain until the 1960s. As the range of acceptable political discourse was narrowed in the 1950s, so, too, were people's personal lives heavily policed, with the heteronormative, hierarchical family understood as a form of protection against the uncertainties of the Cold War world. Within these family units, women who failed to live up to expectations as mothers, housekeepers, and lovers were accused of weakening the position of the United States *vis-à-vis* the Soviet Union. At the same time, both legal and extralegal tactics were employed to enforce heteronormativity, as gay men and lesbians suffered not only from insidious accusations of betraying America to its communist foe, but also from bars to federal and often state employment, denial of G.I. Bill benefits, and regular beatings and even murders. Given this repressive, dangerous atmosphere, it is all the more remarkable that activists persevered—for, as historians have also shown, persevere they did. In tracing the beginnings of the modern gay and lesbian liberation movement to the postwar era and documenting the lives and work of such individual feminists as Betty Friedan and Mary Dublin Keyserling, historians have

revealed links between the 1940s and the 1960s.⁴³

The 1960s themselves, of course, were no egalitarian utopia. As works on the emergence of the women's liberation movement have shown, for instance, the sexism of men in the New Left played a large part in motivating women's decision to organize on their own and for their own advancement. Even within a movement committed to ending hierarchies, women were often reduced to secretaries or sexual objects. Their attempts to discuss their own concerns, moreover, were regularly laughed at or shouted down, dismissed as frivolous or bourgeois in the face of more serious issues such as anti-draft and anti-imperialist activism.⁴⁴

My work adds to this historiography in several ways. First, I document and analyze the ways in which individuals such as Method actress and teacher Stella Adler and playwright Tennessee Williams anticipated many of the strategies and goals of liberal feminism and gay liberation, respectively, providing yet more evidence for the existence

⁴³ On women and families in the Cold War era, see Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988); Laura McEnaney, *Civil Defense Begins at Home: Militarization Meets Everyday Life in the Fifties* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Joanne Meyerowitz, ed., *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994). On the suppression of Popular Front feminism, see Daniel Horowitz, *Betty Friedan and the Making of The Feminine Mystique: The American Left, the Cold War, and Modern Feminism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998); Landon Storrs, "Red Scare Politics and the Suppression of Popular Front Feminism: The Loyalty Investigation of Mary Dublin Keyserling," *Journal of American History* 90, no. 2 (2003): 491-524; Kate Weigand, *Red Feminism: American Communism and the Making of Women's Liberation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001). On heteronormativity and the treatment of gay men and lesbians, see John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988); Carolyn Herbst Lewis, *Prescription for Heterosexuality: Sexual Citizenship in the Cold War Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Nan Boyd, *Wide Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

⁴⁴ On the gender politics of the New Left and the emergence of women's liberation, see Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979); Evans, *Tidal Wave: How Women Changed America at Century's End* (New York: The Free Press, 2003); Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989); Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000).

of a less visible network of resistance that preceded the more public struggles of the 1960s. I also add to our understanding of the gender politics of the New Left by revealing not only how and why authenticity functioned to exclude women, but also how women's liberationists appropriated and altered the concept to form the basis of a structural critique of gender relations. Moreover, as *all* of the groups and individuals I discuss insisted on the primacy of the individual, authentic self, I argue that we should see the 1950s and 1960s not only as a single era, but also as an era singularly informed by a deeply gendered deployment of Cold War anti-totalitarian discourse. Revealing women's ongoing struggles to contest this sexism by claiming authenticity as their own, my work sheds new light on our understanding of the intellectual history of second-wave feminism by showing how it drew on a discourse that historically had excluded women. By exploring different aspects of women's engagement with 1950s culture, I also reveal some of the frustrations and thought processes that prepared them to embrace that new movement.⁴⁵

Chapter Structure

Tracing three overlapping narratives of women's exclusion from, and attempts to write themselves into, the culture of authenticity, my chapters proceed both chronologically and thematically. Chapters one through three focus on Method acting; chapter four on Beat writing; and chapters five through eight on the emergence of identity politics through the New Left and the women's liberation movement. In each of these

⁴⁵ In my emphasis on continuity throughout the postwar era, rather than rupture between the conservative 1950s and liberated 1960s, my work is much more closely aligned with histories of the legacy of Popular Front feminism than it is with many histories of the women's liberation movement.

case studies, men committed to the truth that derived from individual experiences and emotions—the essence of what I call authenticity—extended this privilege only so far as other men. Not content with their exclusion, however, women also made valiant attempts to write themselves in, although these attempts at times recreated the authentic/inauthentic binary they hoped to escape.

In chapter one, I continue the explanation begun in this introduction of how and why authenticity possessed such stunning cultural currency in the postwar era. Cold War fears of secrecy, I argue, ascribed the same qualities to the good artist and the good American; successfully fulfilling the requirements of each role depended on a similar willingness to reveal one's inner self. I chart this mandate first through a discussion of the attempts of the Actors' Equity Association, the largest labor union representing theatrical workers, to prove that they were not controlled by communists, and second through an analysis of the aesthetic philosophy of Method acting. Both artists and Americans, Equity members argued, had a special right, indeed a duty, to express their most deeply held thoughts, feelings, and beliefs. If this right were taken away, they believed, much of what separated the United States from the Soviet Union would also disappear. At the same time, in the context of the Cold War, the failure to reveal one's inner beliefs—as did, for example, HUAC witnesses who took the fifth amendment—was taken as evidence of subversion. Self-expression was thus not only a right, but at times a requirement in Cold War America; telling the truth about oneself, even under duress, functioned as proof of loyal Americanism. The political exigencies of the Cold War were powerful enough to fundamentally affect the rhetoric even of an organization heavily steeped, as Actors' Equity was, in Communist Party-influenced 1930s Popular Front

radicalism. In response to the increasingly powerful anti-communist crusade of the late 1940s and 1950s, left-leaning individuals and organizations placed an ever greater emphasis on the need to express one's true, authentic self. By looking at the intersection of labor politics and cultural production, my work thus reveals new dimensions of the transformation that took place in the American left as a result of the Cold War.

This singular focus on self-revelation, moreover, affected not only the politics of theatrical artists, but also the dominant aesthetic paradigm of the era, Method acting, where authenticity was deployed in a deeply gendered fashion. As the American architect of Method acting, Lee Strasberg encouraged his students to break free from the mechanical habits and behaviors learned through years of socialization in order to express their own authentic emotions and individual truth. However, he did not hesitate to tell his female students that what they perceived as their own personal truths were inauthentic mannerisms that needed to be discarded if they wished to pursue acting successfully. Moreover, when coupled with the roles available for women at the time, Method acting's demand that performers identify with their characters meant that women were constantly being asked to re-live moments from their *own* lives in which they lacked agency and/or had undergone serious traumas. As in the legal threats hanging over the heads of HUAC witnesses, the confessional aspect of authenticity included varying degrees of coercion.

This last thread continues into chapter two, which focuses on playwright Tennessee Williams. Williams's works, which were intimately associated with Method acting and the Actors Studio, were certainly among those demanding that their female performers identify with characters who lacked agency and/or faced crushing inner demons. However, Williams himself believed that revealing his inner self through plays

was a way of evoking audience sympathy and thus countering the state-sanctioned homophobia of the Cold War era, which he associated with totalitarianism. In my analysis of Williams's writings, I have located a complex political-aesthetic theory of social change that was fundamentally dependent on authentic self-revelation as a bulwark against totalitarianism. In this way, he was an intellectual heir to the architects of anti-totalitarian theory. Yet, his theory could not account for the material experiences of the actresses cast in his plays, for whom the self-revelation and identification demanded by Method acting were less than liberating. Moreover, as a gay man living in a repressive, dangerous time, Williams knew that revealing his true self could put his very life on the line. In spite of a political-aesthetic theory dependent on self-revelation, many of his plays manifested simultaneous desires to reveal and conceal—a kind of confessional brinkmanship. I chart these simultaneous desires through a discussion of the 1958 play and 1959 film versions of Williams's *Suddenly Last Summer*.

Not all women theatre artists were willing to accept the version of Method acting promulgated by Lee Strasberg. In chapter three, I discuss the actress and teacher Stella Adler, who rejected the mandate to re-live emotion and focused instead on action. I also connect Adler to feminist Betty Friedan, arguing the techniques Adler developed to produce good acting paralleled the steps Friedan recommended in her 1963 blockbuster, *The Feminine Mystique*, to escape “the problem that has no name,” her term for the unhappiness experienced by women trapped in postwar suburban domesticity. Although there is no evidence that the two knew each other, they were heavily steeped in the same intellectual and political waters. Adler demanded that women who wanted to be artists break free not only from their domestic and familial obligations, but also from the

conventional behaviors they had been taught, re-claiming their true selves in the process. As evidenced by the boxes full of letters she received from female students, Adler's theories also allowed women to feel for the first time like authentic, autonomous individuals. In making arguments intended to write themselves into the culture of authenticity as articulated by, respectively, Method acting and humanistic psychology, however, both Adler and Friedan revealed a kinship to the theorists of mass culture and society, who cast women's usual lives as *inauthentic*, so narrow and repressive that they needed to be escaped and transcended if one hoped to live in accordance with her true self.

These ideas also factor into chapter four, which explores the importance of authenticity to Beat writing. Here, I document and analyze the gender politics described above, arguing that both ideology and the federal support granted to male veterans produced an understanding of authenticity that excluded women. As both male and female writers believed, good art necessarily derived from one's own personal experiences. Yet, only certain experiences—precisely those that were most difficult for women to attain—were considered authentic, and thus useful fodder for writing. Authentic living was the itinerant spontaneity of the transient, the hitchhiker, the rebel who refused to follow the rules of bourgeois society. For a variety of reasons, this was a life that women could rarely pursue. Beyond a legitimate concern with personal safety, women often lacked the material resources that allowed their male counterparts to go “on the road” in pursuit of authentic experience; it was no coincidence, for example, that Jack Kerouac's iconic character, Sal Paradise, embarked on each of his journeys after receiving a G.I. Bill payment. The experiences that *did* characterize many women's

lives, meanwhile—not only child-rearing and domestic responsibilities, but also waged work—were precisely those that the artist most needed to escape. Eventually, however, the women who were involved in this and other countercultural movements—including Joyce Johnson, Hettie Jones, Diane DiPrima, and Anne Roiphe—argued that their experiences, too, could provide the basis for art, and they produced searing memoirs, poems, and novels that made the point. Insisting to men theoretically but not practically committed to the primacy of each person’s individual truth that their voices, too, deserved to be heard, these women anticipated the women’s liberation movement of the 1960s.

Women, that is, inserted themselves into the culture of authenticity repeatedly, for the same sexist pattern that characterized Method acting and Beat writing also manifested itself in the New Left. Chapters five and six explore the meaning of authenticity to the early SDS, focusing on the anti-systematic, anti-ideological stance members developed in order to differentiate themselves from both the Old Left of the 1930s and the conformity of the 1950s. Rejecting all overarching theories and ideologies, from blind faith in Marxism to free-market capitalism, these 1960s radicals made individual thought, emotion, and experience the only measure of truth. However, as I show, this emphasis on individual truth, though similar to the consciousness raising of the women’s liberation movement, was highly raced and gendered. The young, white men who dominated the organization made themselves the arbiters of truth, easily rejecting those worldviews that did not comport with their own.

In chapter seven, I argue that the importance of authenticity to the 1960s left also precluded the emergence of a cultural front similar to that of the 1930s. To SDS

members, the demand that art be ideological threatened the ability of the artist to express her or his own experiences and emotions. For this reason, a political conservative like Jack Kerouac was relevant to 1960s radicals, for his vision of selfhood comported perfectly with their own, but they often rejected didactic art produced by artists whose political commitments dovetailed with their own. Yet, there were analogues to SDS in the cultural realm, producing what I have termed the “cultural convergence.” For example, performance theory architect Richard Schechner drew explicitly on the anti-war activism of the student left, whose demonstrations he saw as both performed and authentic. The attempts of his theatre troupe to involve the audience in the performance also mirrored New Left advocacy of participatory democracy. Moreover, in his attempts to translate New Left politics into a usable aesthetic, Schechner also recreated the movement’s gender politics, insisting on forms of self-revelation both traumatizing and deeply embarrassing for women performers. This chapter also reveals that, for SDS members, performance was the very essence of authenticity, making even clearer their connection to the architects of anti-totalitarianism discussed above. In the struggle to retain one’s individuality, they believed, truth was useless unless it was expressed—unless, that is, it was performed, and performed in front of an audience. Like Tennessee Williams, they believed that this expression of authentic selfhood was a necessary first step in enacting social and political change.

Finally, chapter eight explores the version of authenticity developed in the consciousness-raising sessions of the women’s liberation movement. Like their intellectual predecessors and male contemporaries, women’s liberationists believed that existing political theories were inadequate to explain the reality of their lives, instead

positing the self and its experiences and emotions as the only legitimate measure of truth. In this way, they recreated the debate that took place within the early SDS over the inadequacy of ideology. Yet, this group of women was more comfortable than were their male counterparts with the concept of a communally constructed self, which informed the worldview of male SDS members but was difficult to put into practice. It was in consciousness-raising sessions where each individual woman revealed her own experiences and her feelings about such experiences that these communal, constructed, yet still no less authentic selves were conceptualized and performed. By revealing personal experiences and feelings, participating women created a shared understanding of the patriarchal structures that defined their lives. Women's liberationists were thus able to transform what in practice functioned as a deeply sexist, highly individualist concept—authenticity—into the basis for a structural critique of gender relations. While other understandings of authenticity had long existed alongside the more conservative discourse, it was women's liberationists who were able to turn it into an effective political tool.

Let us make no mistake: the anti-communist crusade in America ruined lives. In its unconstitutional attempts to abrogate freedom of thought and expression, up to and including multi-year prison sentences based solely on political ideology, it not only narrowed the breadth of acceptable political discourse, but also made a mockery of civil liberties. Through blacklists, anti-labor legislation, and banning the employment of those “sex perverts” deemed too weak to defend the United States against its enemies, it denied thousands the ability to earn a living. At times, the experience of blacklisting was so traumatic that it led individuals to commit suicide, as actor Philip Loeb did in 1955.

Anti-communism was used to justify the execution of convicted spy Ethel Rosenberg even as doubts remained about her guilt. It provided rhetorical ammunition to racial segregationists, who strategically equated civil rights legislation with Stalinism and were willing to take radical steps to prevent racial equality. It held women responsible for raising sons strong (i.e., heterosexual) enough to resist communism and apotheosized their (increasingly mythical) status as homemakers not only as the key distinction between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, but also as the potentially decisive factor in determining whether a family lived or died in the case of a nuclear attack.

Anti-communism also deeply influenced the American left. It not only pushed a vibrant movement underground, but also affected the shape it would take when it re-emerged in the 1960s. My work adds new dimensions to our understanding of how this transformation occurred. These changes took place, I argue, largely in concert with an anti-totalitarian theory that posited the deprivation of individuality as the most fundamental level on which such authoritarian regimes functioned. Accordingly, the reclamation of the authentic, individual self was understood as the only way to guarantee that totalitarianism would never take root in U.S. soil. In this way, Cold War anti-totalitarianism fed directly into the emergence of identity politics, in which political convictions were supposed to derive from each person's own experiences and emotions. Adapting at times strategically, at times unself-consciously, to the political exigencies of the Cold War, the left was remade into a movement that rejected all systematic explanations of the world as incipiently totalitarian incursions on individuality. As this occurred, the relationship between culture and leftist politics was also remade, with artists seen as useful less for the ideologies their work conveyed and more for the authenticity

they as individuals seemed to represent. However, if we look beyond discourse to focus on people's lived realities, we see that, in practice, authenticity was not the radically egalitarian idea it was in theory; rather, the men who dominated the cultural and political realms discussed here were willing to extend the validity of individual truth only so far as other, largely white, men. This remade left, then, also posed new challenges and new opportunities for women—how to write themselves into the culture of authenticity. This dissertation tells these stories.

Prologue: Marxist Intellectuals, the Cold War, and American Culture

In their emphasis on the authentic self as a bulwark against totalitarianism, the groups and individuals analyzed in this dissertation shared a common language and a common worldview. In researching, documenting, and analyzing the desperate urgency with which they yearned for authenticity, I discovered that many postwar American artists and activists had so much in common with the Frankfurt School intellectuals who had fled Germany in the 1930s that I must include them in my work. In certain ways the relevance of Frankfurt School intellectuals is not surprising, as their ideas fed directly into such postwar intellectual currents as humanistic psychology and popular sociology, which fundamentally informed how many Americans viewed the world and their place in it. In other ways, however, this influence is surprising indeed, as the ideas of a group of Marxist intellectuals gained a foothold in mainstream American culture just as Marxism itself was most unequivocally disavowed. As an emphasis on the authentic self provided one of the key differences between the Old Left and the New Left, it is worth spending a bit of time tracing the emergence of the argument that connected expression of the self to the fight against totalitarianism and exploring how and why these ideas resonated with postwar Americans. A careful parsing of these ideas provides support for several of my arguments, most fundamentally the primacy of the authentic self to postwar Americans. Moreover, an examination of anti-totalitarian theory reveals how the changes that took place in the left as a result of the Cold War facilitated the development of identity politics. Anti-totalitarianism also helps us to understand the changing relationship

between cultural production and leftist politics, the artist as a sociological category, and the concept of performative authenticity. Finally, these thinkers' ideas show the intellectual underpinnings that allowed white men simultaneously to preach the gospel of individual truth while retaining this privilege largely for themselves alone.

The particular understanding of authenticity that was put in the service of anti-fascism and, after World War Two, anti-totalitarianism, had several sources, starting with the early writings of Karl Marx. In theorizing an alienated self that emerged from capitalist production, Marx simultaneously presumed the potential existence of its opposite—a non-alienated, or authentic, self. As he wrote in 1844, alienated labor forced a situation in which “the spontaneous activity of human imagination, of the human brain and the human heart, operates independently of the individual...so the worker’s activity is not his spontaneous activity. It belongs to another; it is the loss of his self.”¹ This focus on self-alienation traveled through Marx to existentialists Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, anti-colonialist Frantz Fanon, and the Frankfurt School theorists, all of whom were widely read by New Left members by the 1960s and who provided support for an already well-developed belief in authenticity. The flexibility inherent in Marx’s theory of alienation, however, granted a great deal of discretion to whomever controlled the discourse to determine for both themselves and others which feelings and behaviors were manifestations of the alienated self and which emanated from the authentic self. It left room, that is, for Lee Strasberg to tell his actresses that what they perceived as their individual truths were mannerisms, or for New Left men to dismiss their female counterparts’ experiences and emotions as results of false consciousness.

¹ Karl Marx, *Economico-Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, in Marx, *The Portable Karl Marx*, ed. Eugene Kamenka (New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1983), 137.

Another source of the New Left's commitment to authenticity was the small, soul-searching American Old Left of the 1950s. As historian Maurice Isserman has pointed out, Old Left members began by the 1950s to embrace some of the priorities that would later characterize the New Left, suggesting continuity between the two movements. In part these changes occurred in response to Khrushchev's 1956 promise to eschew the "cult of personality" that developed under Stalin and to pursue greater openness and engagement with the West. American CP members were pleased with these developments, as the letters that poured into its organ, the *Daily Worker*, showed. According to Isserman, "Many letter-writers in the *Daily Worker* now complained of the ritualistic, pseudoscientific style of writing and speaking that over the years had allowed the Communists to shut out uncomfortable realities. They had used language as a shield against emotion and uncertainty: if something could be named, then it could be safely pigeonholed and forgotten."² Ideology, that is, was used to shut down any competing interpretations that derived from personal emotion and experience. Still others wrote in celebration of cultural and intellectual forms, such as modernism and Freudianism, that they had not felt comfortable expressing support for before. Letter-writer "Allegro" described it as "a period of discovery and liberation, in a very personal sense, of ourselves as human beings, giving us freer eyes, ears, and hearts to perceive the world with."³ While the brutal suppression of the revolt in Hungary in the fall of 1956 made such enthusiasm impossible to sustain, it is clear that even those CP stalwarts who remained with the party through the height of McCarthyism were yearning for a new

² Maurice Isserman, *If I Had a Hammer: The Death of the Old Left and the Birth of the New Left* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1987), 18.

³ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 22.

direction. The importance of authenticity, then, came in part *from* the Old Left, even as New Left members used their own focus on the self to distinguish themselves from their political forebears. Indeed, as my work shows, some of the key figures involved in disseminating and popularizing the ideas that fed into the New Left's emphasis on authenticity were Old Left members. However, New Left members' desire to prove their newness and differentiate their own generation from that of their parents, both symbolically and, in the case of red-diaper babies, literally, made it difficult to see these shared goals. Even as political anti-communism was largely so irrelevant to SDS that even the presence of communists at their conventions caused little consternation among the organization's members, important aspects of Cold War thought nonetheless shaped their views of the Old Left.

The processes by which authenticity became the imagined antidote to fascism and totalitarianism were not solely creations of the political left. Indeed, by the 1950s this belief was shared by leftists and liberal Cold Warriors alike, and it even bore some similarities to the theories espoused by libertarians such as Ayn Rand.⁴ The American Old Left, moreover, was itself a movement with several factions, one of which eventually fed into the 1970s right. The circle of New York intellectuals who orbited around the *Partisan Review* denounced what they perceived as the mechanical nature of the cultural front and Stalinist politics. After World War Two, these criticisms grew into a cacophonous series of debates over the nature of mass culture. Following such Frankfurt School theorists as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, these self-styled mass culture

⁴ As Jennifer Burns has shown, Rand argued that only "respect for each individual human personality" could stave off the specter of "a Totalitarian America." However, Rand and others like her conflated *individuality* and *individualism* in ways to which most of the groups and individuals discussed in this dissertation were opposed. Ayn Rand quoted in Jennifer Burns, *Goddess of the Market: Ayn Rand and the American Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 59.

theorists argued that the consumption of formulaic “middlebrow” culture deprived people of their individuality and turned them into mindless automatons susceptible to the siren song of totalitarianism. As Bernard Rosenberg, who edited a collection on the subject, put it, “Mass culture threatens not merely to cretinize our taste, but to brutalize our senses while paving the way to totalitarianism.”⁵ Some of the most vocal critics of mass culture were those elites whom Schrecker has dubbed “point men for Cold War liberalism” intellectuals who were “vociferous in their denunciations of the conformity of American life. McCarthyism, suburbia, tailfins, ‘kitsch,’ Communism, and Nazism—they were all, in one way or another, products of mass society.”⁶

Americans of competing political stripes were deeply concerned with the threats of fascism and totalitarianism. As historian Michael Sherry has pointed out, liberal economist Stuart Chase claimed in 1935 “that he could ‘hardly go out to dinner, open a newspaper [or] turn on the radio without encountering the term ‘fascist.’”⁷ Sherry also notes that, while “fascist” was an insult most commonly hurled by those on the left against their political opponents, the term was not solely theirs. Conservatives described Roosevelt’s New Deal as fascist.⁸ Later, the American Medical Association attacked

⁵ Bernard Rosenberg, “Mass Culture in America,” in Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White, eds., *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America* (New York: The Free Press, 1957), 9.

⁶ Ellen Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1998), 410-11.

⁷ Quoted in Michael Sherry, *In the Shadow of War: The United States since the 1930s* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 51-2.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 52.

Truman's attempts to expand the New Deal state through a national health insurance plan as "the kind of regimentation that led to totalitarianism in Germany."⁹

Yet, it *was* the leftist thinkers of the Frankfurt School who insisted earlier than most that the authentic, individual self was the only effective weapon against fascist regimes. Erich Fromm, a psychoanalyst, sociologist, philosopher, and Jewish-German émigré, provided one of the earliest iterations of what after World War Two became the theory of totalitarianism. Fromm, who had fled Germany for the U.S. in the 1930s, wrote *Escape from Freedom* (1941) against the backdrop of an escalating war in Europe. In the book, he argued that fascism flourished not primarily through the use of force, but rather through the ready acquiescence of the masses. The main reason people were drawn to fascism, in Fromm's view, was capitalism, which, though it freed people from the control exercised over them by the church and other authoritarian structures, also alienated people from their true selves and turned them into commodities. A capitalist economy, that is, deemed useful only those parts of a person that contributed to profit; therefore, people learned to express only these limited parts of themselves. In alienating people from their true selves, capitalism also severed people from one another and from any meaningful sense of community. They felt completely alone, and, as a result, they yearned for a connection to *something*, even if it meant submitting to authority—the "escape from freedom" alluded to in the book's title.

Fromm characterized the person who had willingly submitted to authority as someone who had "given up his self in order to become more or less the person he is expected to be." In the process, "all genuine individuality and spontaneity may have

⁹ Ibid., 124.

been lost.”¹⁰ With individuality a prospect too frightening and lonely to bear, “the first mechanism of escape from freedom...is the tendency to give up the independence of one’s own individual self and to fuse one’s self with somebody or something outside of oneself in order to acquire the strength which the individual self is lacking.”¹¹ In other words, fascism arose because the person terrified of her or his alone-ness saw only one solution: “*to get rid of the individual self, to lose oneself...to get rid of the burden of freedom.*”¹²

The personality inclined to fascism was thus also inherently conformist. According to Fromm, most “normal” individuals were too weak to resist the apparently easier path of “automaton conformity,” in which “the individual ceases to be himself; he adopts the kind of personality offered to him by cultural patterns; and he therefore becomes exactly as all others are and as they expect him to be.” So overwhelming was the “need not [to] feel alone and anxious any more” that the individual felt no qualms even in “[giving] up his individual self and becom[ing] an automaton, identical with millions of other automatons around him.”¹³

Rare was the person, moreover, who realized that her or his “original self” had been replaced by a “pseudo self.” Most people continued to believe that their “thoughts, feelings, wishes” were truly theirs—but, according to Fromm, they were mistaken, as “feelings and thoughts...induced from the outside” could “be subjectively experienced as

¹⁰ Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, Inc., 1941), 139.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 141.

¹² *Ibid.*, 152, emphasis in original.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 185-6.

one's own." Fromm argued that people had ceased to be selves at all, becoming instead merely a collection of roles:

The pseudo self is...an agent who actually represents the role a person is supposed to play but who does so under the name of the self. It is true that a person can play many roles and subjectively be convinced that he is "he" in each role. Actually he is in all these roles what he believes he is expected to be, and for many people, if not most, the original self is completely suffocated by the pseudo self.¹⁴

Though convinced that they were being themselves, most people had been replaced by inauthentic imposters, automatons incapable of producing their own thoughts and feelings.

Though most urgently interested in understanding the rise of fascism in the country he had fled, Fromm cautioned Americans not to think themselves immune to this disease, for he saw in his adopted culture many of its contagions. The relative absence of coercive authoritarianism and ostensible right to freedom of expression were no sure bulwarks against fascism's encroachment, for, as he put it, "*the right to express our thoughts...means something only if we are able to have thoughts of our own*; freedom from authority is a lasting gain only if the inner psychological conditions are such that we are able to establish our own individuality."¹⁵ In the picture Fromm painted, the United States appeared not as a mecca of individualism and psychological freedom, but rather as a place occupied by "pseudo selves."

This situation, Fromm argued, derived primarily from the American educational system, which trained individuals to become cogs in the capitalist machine. "In our culture," he wrote, "education too often results in the elimination of spontaneity and in

¹⁴ Ibid., 205.

¹⁵ Ibid., 241.

the substitution of original psychic acts by superimposed feelings, thoughts, and wishes.”¹⁶ Both the formal educational system and U.S. culture more broadly discouraged emotion and creative thought and substituted facts for the recognition and expression of each person’s individual truth. Those who dared to speak about “truth” were deemed backward and unscientific. As a result, “thinking loses its essential stimulus—the wishes and interests of the person who thinks; instead it becomes a machine to register ‘facts.’”¹⁷ In discouraging this “quest for truth,” moreover, educators unwittingly sowed the seeds of fascism. “Truth,” Fromm noted, “is one of the strongest weapons of those who have no power. But the truth is in the individual’s interest not only with regard to his orientation in the outer world; his own strength depends to a great extent on his knowing the truth about himself.”¹⁸ Taught to adopt a pleasant veneer rather than explore and express their own truths, people became distanced from the true selves that were the only effective defense against fascism. As he put it, “the despair of the human automaton is fertile soil for the political purposes of Fascism.”¹⁹

Fromm saw hope yet, however. A “democratic socialist” planned economy, he argued, would obviate anxiety about survival, freeing people from the “automaton conformity” that capitalism mandated and creating the conditions that would allow for self-expression.²⁰ He wrote, “only if man masters society and subordinates the economic machine for the purposes of human happiness and only if he actively participates in the

¹⁶ Ibid., 242.

¹⁷ Ibid., 248.

¹⁸ Ibid., 249.

¹⁹ Ibid., 256.

²⁰ Ibid., 272-5.

social process, can he overcome what now drives him into despair—his aloneness and his feeling of powerlessness.” Contributing to a discourse of the affluent society that would become much more prominent after the war, he argued that “man does not suffer so much from poverty today as he suffers from the fact that he has become a cog in a large machine, an automaton, that his life has become empty and lost its meaning.” As he saw it, the only solution was a form of freedom that allowed for the “active and spontaneous realization of the human self.”²¹

Luckily, there were two groups of people—artists and children—whose selves had remained intact and who could thus provide models for this form of “positive” freedom. Indeed, as Fromm went on to make clear, the theatrical, performative implications of his distinction between selves and roles were not accidental, for, despite his emphasis on the freedom to preserve one’s *inner* self, he also believed that this freedom was useless unless this inner self was expressed. “The realization of the self,” he argued, “is accomplished not only by an act of thinking but also by the realization of man’s total personality, by the active expression of his emotional and intellectual potentialities. These potentialities are present in everybody; they become real only to the extent to which they are expressed.”²² As Fromm saw it, the people who had been most successful in attaining this “*spontaneous activity of the total, integrated personality*”²³ were artists:

While spontaneity is a relatively rare phenomenon in our culture, we are not entirely devoid of it...In the first place, we know of individuals who are—or have

²¹ Ibid., 276.

²² Ibid., 258.

²³ Ibid., emphasis in original.

been—spontaneous, whose thinking, feeling, and acting were the expression of their selves and not of an automaton. These individuals are mostly known to us as artists. As a matter of fact, the artist can be defined as an individual who can express himself spontaneously.²⁴

In Fromm's model, which equated fascism with the inability to express—or even recognize—the true self and its thoughts and emotions, living like an artist was the only way to guarantee freedom. Those hoping to stave off fascism would accordingly do well to emulate the artist, as “there are other individuals who, though lacking the ability—or perhaps merely the training—for expressing themselves in an objective medium as the artist does, possess the same spontaneity.”²⁵ If those with the potential for spontaneity could learn, as the artist did, to act as individuals and not automatons, all might not be lost.

The concept of spontaneity was crucial to Fromm's formulation because, in connecting the individual to her or his true self, it countered the loneliness that was engendered by capitalism and that left people yearning for some form of connection, even to an authoritarian regime. That is, “spontaneous activity” was “the answer to the problem of freedom” because it was “the one way in which man can overcome his terror of aloneness without sacrificing the integrity of his self; for in the spontaneous realization of the self man unites himself anew with the world—with man, nature, and himself.”²⁶ As spontaneous activity strengthened the self, the individual was better able to resist the temptation of giving in to authoritarianism; conversely, “the inability to act spontaneously, to express what one genuinely feels and thinks, and the resulting necessity

²⁴ Ibid., 259.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 260-1.

to present a pseudo self to others” perpetuated the alienation on which fascism preyed.²⁷ Moreover, in apotheosizing the “active and creative individual” who was aware that “*there is only one meaning of life: the act of living itself*,”²⁸ Fromm went so far as to argue that *any* theory or practice that did not recognize the primacy of this self was incipiently fascist. “Positive freedom,” he wrote, “implies the principle that there is no higher power than this unique individual self, that man is the center and purpose of his life; that the growth and realization of man’s individuality is an end that can never be subordinated to purposes which are supposed to have greater dignity.” He believed that a “genuine ideal” was “not some veiled force superior to the individual, but...the articulate expression of utmost affirmation of the self.”²⁹ Accordingly, “any ideal which is in contrast to such affirmation proves by this very face that it is not an ideal but a pathological aim.”³⁰ Political and ideological models that did not recognize the self as the most important measure of truth, that is, were inherently suspect.

An adjunct professor of psychology at New York University in the 1960s, Fromm had many opportunities to come into contact with the decade’s leftist social movements. Todd Gitlin, SDS president in 1963-4, has noted that he was influenced as a student at Harvard by a 1960 Committee for a SANE Nuclear Policy rally at which the older man spoke.³¹ Fromm also endorsed SDS’s 1965 march in Washington, D.C., the event that

²⁷ Ibid., 262.

²⁸ Ibid., 263.

²⁹ Ibid., 265.

³⁰ Ibid., 267-8.

³¹ Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam, 1987), 87.

catapulted the organization to national recognition.³² Three years later, he spoke at Columbia University's counter-commencement for those students who had been arrested during the university's occupation that spring.

The stunning intellectual connections between Fromm and SDS, however, deserve more than the brief mentions they have received from other historians, especially in the service of better understanding of the organization's conception of authenticity.³³ Members' insistence that both work and education turned people into cogs in a machine, for instance, bore many similarities to Fromm's formulation, as did their vision for an automated, planned economy that would allow people to reclaim their true selves from the alienating forces of capitalism. Fromm's general concern with conformity, automatons, and individuals also resonated with the later organization. An automated economy, SDS members believed, would rescue human beings from the system that turned them into automatons.

Two other similarities, however, are even more interesting. First, Fromm held up individual truth as the surest bulwark against fascism. In their attempts to distance themselves from their Old Left forebears, SDS members would make the same argument. Second, insisting that individual truth was useless as long as it remained inside, Fromm argued that artists were the people best equipped to stave off fascism. 1960s radicals

³² Kirkpatrick Sale, *SDS* (New York: Random House, 1973), 174.

³³ James Miller has noted that Tom Hayden read Fromm's *The Sane Society* as he was preparing to write his draft of the Port Huron Statement, while Doug Rossinow has made the connection between Fromm's emphasis on love and symbolism and the Austin, Texas, Christian Faith-and-Life-Community, which future SDS members such as Casey Hayden gravitated toward. James Miller, "*Democracy Is in the Streets*": *From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 94; Doug Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 66, 79.

would similarly apotheosize artists as people who not only had retained their individuality but also knew how to express it.

Herbert Marcuse, by the 1960s a professor at Brandeis University, was the Frankfurt School member most explicitly connected to the American New Left. As Douglas Kellner has noted in a volume of Marcuse's collected papers dedicated to this connection, "in the 1960s Herbert Marcuse ascended to the unlikely role of Guru of the New Left,"³⁴ and as the New Left was influenced by Marcuse—especially his *One-Dimensional Man* (1964)—so, too, was he excited about its emergence. Marcuse supported and advised its members, although he was always careful not to take too much credit for their ideas. Like Fromm, he had actual contact with New Leftists. He attended a 1962 SDS conference at Brandeis, where his students numbered among members of the organization.³⁵ He also supported SDS's Radical Education Project, founded in 1966 as a clearinghouse for efforts to reform the university.³⁶ At the intellectual level, however, these connections have not been fully limned, with historians tending to focus on Marcuse's contributions to the theory of the new working class or his embrace of sexual liberation, occasionally mentioning, but not analyzing, his critique of tolerance.³⁷ Yet, this critique of tolerance was the key to understanding how authenticity, itself fundamentally dependent on the recognition of individual truth, could be used against people whose individual truths those in power did not wish to recognize.

³⁴ Douglas Kellner, "Introduction: Radical Politics, Marcuse, and the New Left," in Herbert Marcuse, *The New Left and the 1960s: Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse, Volume Three*, ed. Kellner (London: Routledge, 2005), 2.

³⁵ Sale, 86.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 289.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 338; Rossinow, 249-50, 267-9, 288, 322-3; Miller, 285.

As will be discussed in chapter five, the SDS position on work and automation was particularly consonant with Marcuse's ideas. Here, I wish only to show how his theories contributed to an understanding of authenticity that allowed those in power—i.e., men—to extend the concept only so far as they saw fit. In both 1964's *One-Dimensional Man* and the following year's "Repressive Tolerance," Marcuse promulgated a distinction between true and false needs, thoughts, feelings, and desires in a way that comported quite closely with the view espoused by SDS members—a view that both granted the individual the ability to determine her or his truth and simultaneously reserved the right to accuse others of operating within the confines of false consciousness. "We may," he wrote, "distinguish both true and false needs. 'False' are those which are superimposed upon the individual by particular social interest in their repression"; it followed that "true" needs were those that emanated from the individual.³⁸ "In the last analysis," Marcuse argued, "the question of what are true and false needs must be answered by the individuals themselves, but only in the last analysis; that is, if and when they are free to give their own answer. As long as they are kept incapable of being autonomous, as long as they are indoctrinated and manipulated (down to their very instincts), *their answer to this question cannot be taken as their own.*"³⁹ In a view that would be criticized by members of the women's liberation movement, Marcuse was particularly critical of consumption, attacking those who "recognize[d] themselves in their commodities" and "[found] their very soul in their automobile, hi-fi set, split-level

³⁸ Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 4-5.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 6, emphasis added.

home, kitchen equipment.”⁴⁰ Although he did not single out women in particular, liberationists recognized in his attacks the prevalent postwar discourse linking women and consumption. While he insisted that “no tribunal can justly arrogate to itself the right to decide which needs should be developed and satisfied,” he wondered how people who did not even recognize their own true needs could “by themselves create the conditions of freedom.”⁴¹

The following year, Marcuse arrived at an answer to the vexing question. In his critique of “repressive tolerance,” defined as a stubborn, misguided faith in objectivity and a concomitant refusal to condemn deleterious beliefs, he argued that most people in such ostensibly free societies as the U.S. were too brainwashed to recognize their own unfreedom. “The people exposed to this impartiality,” he wrote,

are no tabulae rasa, they are indoctrinated by the conditions under which they live and think and which they do not transcend. To enable them to become autonomous, to find by themselves what is true and what is false for man in the existing society, they would have to be freed from the prevailing indoctrination (which is no longer recognized as indoctrination).⁴²

Sounding very much like an advocate of New Left-style participatory democracy, Marcuse went on to argue that true freedom was possible only in “a society in which ‘the people’ have become autonomous individuals, freed from the repressive requirements of a struggle for existence in the interest of domination, and as such human beings choosing their government and determining their life.”⁴³ Because they did not realize that they

⁴⁰ Ibid., 9.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Herbert Marcuse, “Repressive Tolerance,” in Marcuse, et al, *A Critique of Pure Tolerance* (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1969), 112. The piece was written in 1965.

⁴³ Ibid., 118-19.

were not autonomous individuals, however, most people were incapable of achieving this freedom. Therefore, it was up to “everyone ‘in the maturity of his faculties’ as a human being, everyone who has learned to think rationally and autonomously” to “make these distinctions, definitions, identifications” of the differences between true and false needs, thoughts, feelings, and desires “for the society as a whole.”⁴⁴ Marcuse’s views thus coincided with those promoted by the radical white men who dominated SDS: individual truth was paramount, but only when that individual truth was not determined by a person “in the maturity of his faculties” to be an inauthentic vestige of false consciousness. His theories provided justification for the New Left’s exclusionary deployment of authenticity.

Many of the ideas discussed above also made their way into the work of political theorist Hannah Arendt, yet another Jewish-German émigré. Arendt emerged as one of the key architects of the concept of “totalitarianism,” a notion that conflated Nazi Germany and the Stalinist Soviet Union and identified regimes in which all individuality and freedom of thought had been taken away. Indeed, as she argued in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), the destruction of individuality was the totalitarian regime’s most crucial distinguishing feature. “Total domination,” she wrote, “which strives to organize the infinite plurality and differentiation of human beings as if all of humanity were just one individual, is possible only if each and every person can be reduced to a never-changing identity of reactions, so that each of these bundles of reactions can be exchanged at random for any other.”⁴⁵ In both Germany and the Soviet Union,

⁴⁴ Ibid., 120.

⁴⁵ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, in Arendt, *The Portable Hannah Arendt*, ed. Peter Baehr (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 119.

concentration camps were “meant not only to exterminate people and degrade human beings, but also serve the ghastly experiment of eliminating, under scientifically controlled conditions, spontaneity itself as an expression of human behavior and of transforming the human personality into a mere thing, into something that even animals are not.”⁴⁶ Totalitarianism, that is, did not function solely through the use of corporeal force, as physical means alone were not enough to deprive people of their humanity. Rather, as “the one thing that still prevents men” under the most horrid, unthinkable conditions “from being made into living corpses is the differentiation of the individual, his unique identity,” totalitarianism focused on destroying “the uniqueness of the human person.”⁴⁷ One of its key functions was “the killing of man’s individuality,” turning individuals into “ghastly marionettes with human faces, which all behave like the dog in Pavlov’s experiments, which all react with perfect reliability even when going to their own death, and which do nothing but react.”⁴⁸ “Those who aspire to total domination,” she wrote,

must liquidate all spontaneity, such as the mere existence of individuality will always engender, and track it down in its most private forms, regardless of how unpolitical and harmless these may seem. Pavlov’s dog, the human specimen reduced to the most elementary reactions, the bundle of reactions that can always be liquidated and replaced by other bundles of reactions that behave in exactly the same way, is the model “citizen” of a totalitarian state; and such a citizen can be produced only imperfectly outside of the camps.⁴⁹

In this view, the very essence of totalitarianism was the removal of the potential for any one human being to act differently from any other.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 133-34.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 135.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 136.

Concomitantly, totalitarianism functioned through the denial of individual truth; the sheer scale of atrocities led some people to doubt, for example, Holocaust survivors' stories of their own experiences. "Anyone speaking or writing about concentration camps," Arendt wrote, "is still regarded as suspect; and if the speaker has resolutely returned to the world of the living, he himself is often assailed by doubts with regard to his own truthfulness." Part of the evil of totalitarianism was "this doubt of people concerning themselves and the reality of their own experiences." Accordingly, the author implied, any anti-totalitarian program must recognize both the validity of personal truths emanating from the individual and the importance of expressing these truths.⁵⁰

Like Fromm, that is, Arendt believed that freedom was useless as long as it remained on the inside. She argued in 1960 that "this freedom which we take for granted in all political theory...is the very opposite of 'inner freedom,' the inward space into which men may escape from external coercion and *feel* free. This inner feeling remains without outer manifestations and hence is by definition politically irrelevant."⁵¹ In contrast, relevant freedom existed only in *action*. "Unlike the judgment of the intellect which precedes action," she wrote, "and unlike the command of the will which initiates it, the inspiring principle becomes fully manifest only in the performing act itself...Men *are* free—as distinguished from their possessing the gift of freedom—as long as they act, neither before nor after; for to *be* free and to act are the same."⁵²

⁵⁰ Ibid., 120.

⁵¹ Hannah Arendt, "Between Past and Future," in Arendt, *The Portable Hannah Arendt*, ed. Peter Baehr (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 440.

⁵² Ibid., 445-6.

Also echoing Fromm, Arendt went on to make clear that she intended “act” in both the literal and theatrical sense and that her use of “performing” was no accident, for she found performing artists to be the most appropriate example of the kind of freedom she was trying to illustrate. Noting that politics had often been compared to an art, Arendt argued that such was really only the case for the performing arts, where the creative process was on full display (as opposed to, for example, painting, where audience members only saw the finished product). “The performing arts,” she wrote, “have indeed a strong affinity with politics. Performing artists... need an audience to show their virtuosity, just as acting men need the presence of others before whom they can appear; both need a publicly organized space for their ‘work,’ and both depend upon others for the performance itself.”⁵³ Here, Arendt seemed to define politics not as the actions of politicians, but rather as what Jurgen Habermas later called the public sphere: a place in which all citizens could gather to debate policies and ideas. Defined as it was by action, true freedom was not a private act, but one that demanded an audience. Arendt essentially argued that performance—the spontaneous expression of one’s individuality in front of an audience—was the key to staving off totalitarianism. In this way, her theories not only anticipated Betty Friedan and SDS but also paralleled those espoused by artists like Lee Strasberg and Stella Adler.

Similar ideas were disseminated through postwar culture to people like Betty Friedan through the field of humanistic psychology, which was itself heavily influenced by thinkers like Erich Fromm. In his theory of self-actualization, for example, psychologist Abraham Maslow was deeply invested in the preservation and expression of the true, authentic self. Better understood as “full-humanness,” self-actualization as

⁵³ Ibid., 446.

defined by Maslow was the process by which people discovered and developed the capacity to express their true selves.⁵⁴ Indeed, he often used the term authentic as a synonym for self-actualized.

Like the existentialists on whom he drew and the New Leftists whom he anticipated, Maslow believed that truth could only emanate from the self. He saw “the concept of identity and the experience of identity as a *sine qua non* of human nature” and was inclined to privilege “experiential knowledge” over “systems of concepts or abstract categories or a prioris.” What existentialism offered psychology, he argued, was the use of “personal, subjective experience as the foundation upon which abstract knowledge is built.”⁵⁵

Maslow was no relativist, however, cautioning people not to mistake his faith in individual truth as an uncritical acceptance of all viewpoints.⁵⁶ Rather, the author believed that the authentic self was always a good, kind, non-prejudiced, *non-fascist* self. The “inner nature” of a human being, he argued, was “good or neutral rather than bad.”⁵⁷ Healthy people, he wrote, “if *really* free choice is possible, tend spontaneously to choose the true rather than the false, good rather than evil, beauty rather than ugliness, integration rather than dissociation, joy rather than sorrow, aliveness rather than deadness, uniqueness rather than stereotypy, and so on...”⁵⁸ By contrast, selfishness and

⁵⁴ Abraham Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being* (1968; repr., New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1982), vi-vii. The chapters of this book were originally presented or published between 1956-1962.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 121-2.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 168.

hatred emanated from *repressing* the authentic self. It was in this way, and not in terms of adjustment to society, that health and sickness should be judged. In an example he returned to several times, for instance, Maslow argued that Nazi concentration camp guards and German citizens alike were able to ignore and even actively participate in the atrocities because they were ill—because they repressed their true selves.⁵⁹ Had they been self-actualized, their consciences would have demanded that they take action. Maslow’s philosophy did not admit that a true, authentic self could also be a fascist self. Self-actualization thus had a social as well as an individual purpose, as a society of self-actualized people could, in Maslow’s view, never fall prey to fascism.

More generally, self-actualized people possessed a salutary resistance to the herd mentality so easily fallen into by others. The healthy individual displayed a “distaste...for being rubricized or casually classified, i.e., for being deprived of his individuality, his uniqueness, his difference from all others, his special identity.”⁶⁰ The self-actualized were “ruled by the laws of their own character rather than by the rules of society.”⁶¹ “My feeling,” he wrote, “is that people in peak-experiences,” a form of temporary self-actualization, “are *most* their identities, closest to their real selves, most idiosyncratic...”⁶² Expressive, uninhibited, and spontaneous, self-actualized individuals had attained

...the acme of uniqueness, individuality or idiosyncrasy. If all people are different from each other in principle, they are *more* purely different in the peak-experiences. If in many respects (their roles), men are interchangeable, then in

⁵⁹ See, for example, *ibid.*, 7, 66.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 103.

the peak-experiences, roles drop away and men become least interchangeable. Whatever they are at bottom, whatever the word “unique self” means, they are more that in the peak-experiences.⁶³

Maslow, moreover, connected self-actualized people’s ability to express their true selves to artistic creativity. He wrote, “the implication [of self-actualization] for identity theory is that more authentic persons may, by that very fact, become more like poets, artists, musicians, prophets, etc.”⁶⁴ Echoing Erich Fromm and Hannah Arendt and anticipating scores of New Left activists, Maslow argued that being authentic and being an artist were one and the same.

Maslow himself did not support the radicalism of the 1960s. Although he shared SDS’s socialism, his virulent anti-communism prevented him from opposing the war in Vietnam, which became a central issue of the student left. He perceived American Communist Party members as “hostile and embittered individuals who espoused an abstract love of humanity while inwardly seething with hatred for themselves and others” and the Soviet Union as “an undesirable example of a system that embraces collective actualization at the expense of individual fulfillment.”⁶⁵ In the 1960s, these views translated into an inability to condemn the U.S. intervention in Vietnam. On a more abstract level, Maslow perceived the 1960s left as “valueless.” He was critical of his daughter, Ellen, who counted among its members. “Ellen’s political and work position,” he wrote, “is in effect a non-position, nonideological, even anti-intellectual.” Young radicals, Maslow argued,

⁶³ Ibid., 108.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Edward Hoffman, *The Right to Be Human: A Biography of Abraham Maslow* (Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher, Inc., 1988), 160.

...have no heroes or sacred texts...The Communists and Socialists and other “parties” they consider ridiculous and laugh at...One thing seems clear about this group. They reject *society* itself, *any* society, the machinery, the structure, the necessities...Poor kids. They’re all doomed to depression, disillusionment, and eventually feeling stupid...[unless they] compromise.⁶⁶

Maslow was correct on one count; as chapter six will show, New Left activists rejected overarching theories and ideologies as abrogations of authentic individuality that could only lead to totalitarianism. However, these same young people were deeply disappointed in the valuelessness they perceived in the broader society, and the positions they developed to combat this valuelessness were precisely those prescribed by the older man. Like Maslow, they believed that values emanating from one’s true self—as opposed to those false or sick values imposed by society—could only be democratic, unselfish, and, most importantly, both non- and anti-totalitarian.

Liberal historian Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. made a similar argument in *The Vital Center* (1949), which celebrated New Deal liberalism as the guardian of freedom. Schlesinger condemned the “totalitarian right” and the “totalitarian left” in equal measure. Both were guilty of “mistaking abstractions,” like communism and free-market capitalism, “for concrete realities.”⁶⁷ Eventually, this error led both to “meet...on the murky grounds of tyranny and terror.”⁶⁸ However, the appeal of communism to the idealistic led him to a particular concern with “protecting the liberal faith from Communism.”⁶⁹ Drawing explicitly on such thinkers as Jean-Paul Sartre and Erich

⁶⁶ Abraham Maslow quoted in *ibid.*, 294.

⁶⁷ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom* (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1949), 3.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, ix-x.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, ix. Schlesinger’s argument was actually subtler than most, distinguishing between Marx, whom he offered a place in the canon of western theorists of democracy, and the Stalinist Soviet Union and between

Fromm, whose argument he largely recreated, Schlesinger argued that “totalitarianism...pulverizes the social structure, grinding all independent groups and diverse loyalties into a single amorphous mass.”⁷⁰ Totalitarianism flourished, moreover, not against the will of the people but in direct response to it. Modern technology, society, and industrialism wrenched people from the traditional structures that provided order, leaving them “free,” but alone and confused. They yearned for the discipline that totalitarianism would bring back to their lives.⁷¹ Totalitarianism and individuality, that is, were fundamentally at odds. The “totalitarian man,” Schlesinger argued, was “oriented against his own individuality.”⁷² Only in recognizing the value of the individual could totalitarianism be avoided, and only a “non-Communist” or “democratic” left could accomplish this. As Schlesinger put it,

The essential strength of democracy as against totalitarianism lies in its startling insight into the value of the individual...It is only so far as that insight can achieve a full social dimension, so far as individualism derives freely from community, that democracy will be immune to the virus of totalitarianism.⁷³

Like Maslow, Schlesinger went on to support the Vietnam War and denounce the New Left, even as its members made similar arguments about democracy and individuality.

Communism and fascism. Despite the differences he identified between the two, however, he felt comfortable subsuming both under the term totalitarianism.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 53.

⁷¹ Ibid., 4, 51-54.

⁷² Ibid., 56. Interestingly, Schlesinger also commented on the relationship between totalitarianism and cultural production. He wrote, “As James T. Farrell has pointed out, writers who accept easy social formulas may gain a superficial and temporary clarity about the world they live in; but they pay a price for allowing others to tell them what they ought to think and write...The writer, it is clear, must have social perspectives—but they must be his own. The susceptibility to programs corrupts the artist by distorting and eventually superseding the personal truths by which he is nourished.” Ibid., 124.

⁷³ Ibid., 248.

By the 1950s, then, Marxists and liberal Cold Warriors alike understood totalitarianism and authenticity as opposites, and they defined these terms in similar ways. While different commentators certainly applied such labels to different policies and nations, these intellectual confluences point to a commonly-held set of beliefs at multiple points along the political spectrum. Yet, it *was* the left that developed these theories and defined these terms most thoroughly. Drawing on both their own experiences with fascism and the young Marx's theory of alienation, German-born intellectuals defined fascism, later totalitarianism, as the deprivation of individuality, recommending a self-based politics of authenticity as the antidote. These ideas were echoed by the American-born anti-Stalinist intellectuals in the orbit of the *Partisan Review*. Moreover, in the direct influence of thinkers like Fromm on anti-communist socialist Abraham Maslow and liberal Cold Warrior Arthur Schlesinger, the young Marx provided some of the rhetorical ammunition that was directed against the Soviet Union. The rest of this dissertation will show both the broad dissemination of these ideas in postwar culture and the ways in which such ideas eventually fed back into the white New Left. By that point, however, direct intellectual connections to the Frankfurt School, though myriad, were also redundant, so thoroughly had the discourse of authenticity been absorbed by the broader American culture. New Left members who read Marcuse, for instance, largely found confirmation of what they already knew, rather than new ideas. In this way, the white New Left grew quite fundamentally out of the culture in which it was steeped and that it claimed to reject.

Chapter One: “A Fine Artist and a Good American”: Secrecy and Confession in the Actors’ Equity Association and Method Acting

“Every effort to confine Americanism to a single pattern, to constrain it to a single formula, is disloyalty to everything that is valid in Americanism.” —Henry Steele Commager, “What Is a Loyal American?,” 1947¹

“...I never liked the implication of the term system.” —Lee Strasberg, *A Dream of Passion: The Development of the Method*, 1989²

On October 2, 1945, the Executive Secretary of the Actors’ Equity Association wrote a letter to the President of the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) to protest the organization’s decision not to allow African-American performer Hazel Scott to appear in a concert being held in Constitution Hall. In the Association’s view, this decision not only made a mockery of the goals of “freedom, democracy and equal rights for all peoples regardless of race, creed or color” that the United States had recently been involved in a four-year struggle to attain abroad, but also was fundamentally irreconcilable with the fundamental tenets of Americanism. In stifling the individual voice of any individual, particularly “a fine artist and a good American,” the DAR had failed to uphold the basic founding principles of the nation.³

The Cold War mounted serious attacks on the legitimacy and even loyalty of theatrical artists. In their own defense, artists argued that to be “a fine artist and a good

¹ Quoted in Jon Polan, statement to membership, September 18, 1953, folder 25.15, Actors’ Equity Records, Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University, New York, NY [hereafter “Actors’ Equity Records”].

² Lee Strasberg, *A Dream of Passion: The Development of the Method* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988), 84.

³ Paul Dullzell to Mrs. Julius Young Talmadge, President General, National Secretary of the Daughters of the American Revolution, October 2, 1945, folder 8.1, Actors’ Equity Association Records.

American” were one and the same. The first duty of artists, they insisted, was to express their thoughts, feelings, and beliefs. These expressions were the special rights of Americans and, indeed, what separated the U.S. from totalitarian regimes around the world, especially the Soviet Union. By their very nature, both artists and Americans believed not only in the importance of their own thoughts and feelings, but also, and most importantly, in their right to *express* these thoughts and feelings.

I pursue these lines of thought in two ways. First, I draw on the archival records of the Actors’ Equity Association to analyze the effects that anti-communism had on the organization, the main labor union representing theatrical workers. As secrecy came to be associated with subversion and communism and thus anathema to Americanism, both anti-communist and anti-censorship elements within the organization emphasized the importance of self-revelation and self-expression. On the one hand, members who favored loyalty oaths and anti-communist or anti-totalitarian affidavits believed that communism took away the ability of each person to express her- or himself, replacing individuality with sterile conformity and repression. On the other, a majority of members saw Joseph McCarthy and all he represented as themselves forms of totalitarianism incompatible with the rights given to *both* artists *and* Americans: incumbent on both groups was the requirement to stand up to the forces of repression and express one’s most deeply-held thoughts, beliefs, and feelings. In keeping with a liberal discourse that attempted to balance anti-communism with anti-McCarthyism, Actors’ Equity members framed self-expression as the most important distinction between the United States and the Soviet Union; if this right disappeared, so, too, would differences between the two nations.

In staking out these three different camps, Equity members acted out the same drama that characterized other organizations threatened by McCarthyism. They played the same parts and read the same lines as did, for example, their analogues in the Screen Directors Guild. Thus, while Equity's left-leaning members fundamentally linked self-expression with anti-fascism and anti-totalitarianism, they did not believe, as later artists and activists did, that their ability to express themselves was threatened by following a script or toeing a political line. My analysis of Equity's anti-fascist politics thus provides a glimpse into the development of one aspect of the discourse of authenticity; my work on simultaneous developments in the aesthetic realm helps to explain another.

The need for self-expression and self-revelation as a bulwark against totalitarianism, that is, not only influenced the internal politics of Actors' Equity but also manifested itself in the dominant aesthetic paradigm of postwar theatre. In the second part of this chapter, I explore the gendered ramifications of these beliefs through an analysis of the work of director Lee Strasberg, who believed authentic self-expression was paramount. As the American architect of Method acting, Strasberg, whose published writings form the basis of my analysis, encouraged his students to break free from the mechanical habits and behaviors learned through years of socialization in order to express their own authentic emotions. As deployed in Method acting, however, authenticity was deeply gendered. Strasberg did not hesitate to tell his female students that what they perceived as their own personal truths were mannerisms that needed to be discarded if they wished to pursue acting successfully. Moreover, when coupled with the roles available for women at the time, Method acting's demand that performers identify with their characters meant that women were constantly being asked to re-live moments in

their *own* lives in which they lacked agency and/or had undergone serious traumas—all in the pursuit of authenticity. Yet, Strasberg's Method acting, which emphasized the self as the measure of truth (and the need to express this truth), also help us to understand the emergence of identity politics from the conservative milieu of Cold War America.

The Popular Front Meets the Cold War: Actors' Equity and Anti-Communism

Founded in 1913 in New York City, the Actors' Equity Association quickly became the largest labor union devoted to organizing and protecting theatrical workers. Winning recognition as a legitimate bargaining agent from the Producing Managers Association after an eight-city, fifty-three-production-wide strike in 1919, Equity achieved a closed shop in 1924 and a minimum wage for its members in 1933. Despite its strong commitment to the war effort, Equity found itself on the defensive, and the loyalty of its members challenged, in the years after World War Two. Anti-communist scrutiny of the entertainment industry was the reason.⁴

The pattern of Equity's response to these developments had begun to take shape several years earlier. The union attempted to forge a middle ground, condemning censorship and communism in equal measure, with the rank-and-file generally pulling in

⁴ This chapter also fills in historiographical gaps in labor, cultural, and Cold War history. While there is some scholarship on the formative period of Actors' Equity in the early twentieth century, work on the postwar era is remarkably scarce, with the union's struggles perhaps overshadowed by the flashier activities of the Screen Actors' Guild and its president, Ronald Reagan (1947-52, 1959). K. Kevyne Baar, an archivist at Tamiment Library and the Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, where the Actors' Equity Records are held, has written a dissertation and published a documentary article celebrating Equity's anti-blacklisting stance, and Glenn D. Smith, Jr., has published an article discussing the life and work of blacklisted actor Philip Loeb. See K. Kevyne Baar, "Investigating Broadway: The House Committee on Un-American Activities Meets Members of the New York Theatre Community at Foley Square Courthouse, August 15-18, 1955" (PhD diss., Saybrook Graduate School, 2006) ; Baar, "What Has My Union Done for Me?": The Screen Actors Guild, the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists, and Actors' Equity Association Respond to McCarthy-Era Blacklisting," *Film History* 20 (2008): 437-55; and Glenn D. Smith, Jr., "The Guiding Spirit': Philip Loeb, the Battle for Television Jurisdiction, and the Broadcasting Industry Blacklist," *American Journalism* 26, no. 3 (Summer 2009): 93-150.

the former direction and the Council, the membership-elected leadership, in the latter. The bulk of Equity members did not see a contradiction between the organization's September 1940 anti-communist statement—coinciding with the Smith Act, which made advocating the overthrow of the government a federal crime—and participation in meetings, fundraising efforts, and rallies organized by the Stop Film Censorship Committee, which, if not a Communist Party front, certainly shared its wartime goals, the following year.⁵

While this position may seem tepid, its radicalism should not be underestimated. Equity members and leadership alike, for example, often criticized their parent organization, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), for its perceived acquiescence to, and even encouragement of, investigations into the loyalty of performers. Additionally, rank-and-file members (more so than leadership, which regularly rejected resolutions to this effect) were keenly aware of the double burden blacklisting placed on African-American performers, especially those whose criticisms of the Jim Crow system were deemed subversive. As both members of a labor union and artists, two identities that were intensely politicized after World War Two, Actors' Equity trod dangerous ground in challenging the status quo, however mild that challenge may have been.

The differences that existed *within* Equity had roots stretching back at least into the 1930s, and they had to do with two competing visions for Equity's role in the lives of performers. While some members ("regulars") envisioned a professional organization focused on setting standards for the industry, others ("independents") wanted Equity to function as a more straightforward labor union. On multiple occasions in the 1930s, the

⁵ Florida Friebus, Anti-Blacklisting Committee Report, 1953, folder 23.33, Actors' Equity Records; Equity Council Resolution, September 16, 1941, folder 7.27, Actors' Equity Records.

union group challenged the leadership of the professional group, but they were always soundly defeated.⁶

These differences overlapped with issues of communism and anti-communism, as the professional faction successfully used the presence of Popular Front radicals in the union faction to discredit their attempts to wrest control of the organization. Certainly there *were* Communist Party members and sympathetic allies in this faction, but there were also many New Deal liberals and progressives. At the same time, Equity members of various political stripes supported some of the same goals as the Communist Party. At a May 4, 1940 meeting, a motion was raised calling for American neutrality in World War Two, a position in line with the Molotov-Ribbentrop non-aggression pact reached between Germany and the Soviet Union the previous year. The motion was quickly ruled out of order. That same year, members of an independent ticket accused by Equity regulars of being communists secured some success in Equity elections, leading to the resignation of two vice presidents and eight Council members. Although resignations were intended as protests against “subversive elements,” the official statement issued by the group bemoaned that Equity had turned from a professional organization into a labor union. In the years to come, Equity members would act in line with the Communist Party on issues ranging from the second front to the anti-labor Taft-Hartley Act. Yet, support for these causes came not only from leftists and progressives, but also from liberal non-communists *and* conservative anti-communists.⁷

⁶ John Cogley, et al, “Political Blacklisting in the Radio-Television Industry: A Report to the President of the Fund for the Republic,” 1956, in folder 31.16, Actors’ Equity Records. Cogley’s assistant on this report was the twenty-eight-year-old Michael Harrington, who inscribed the copy of the report given to Equity Anti-Blacklisting Committee chair Florida Friebus, “To Florida, With all the thanks in the world for helping to make this possible. Michael Harrington for all of us.”

⁷ Ibid.

Communists were never a majority of Equity's members, and they certainly never controlled the organization, although it is true that many of those most opposed to censorship during and after World War Two had roots in the progressive union faction of the 1930s and early 1940s. Even many regulars agreed that the communist influence within Equity was overstated. In 1940, a coalition of both regulars and independents voted in support of a motion denying accusations by Congressman William P. Lambertson (R-KS) that Equity was Communist-controlled.⁸ Lambertson had based his accusation on both the neutrality motion and the recent election of such independents as Sam Jaffe and Philip Loeb to the Equity Council.⁹ In the 1950s, a conservative director estimated that, at their peak, communists made up only five percent of Equity members.¹⁰ Bert Lytell, the organization's president and an avowed anti-communist, was so confident that Equity was free from communist influence that, in response to Lambertson's accusations, he *asked* the Dies Committee, predecessor to the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), for an investigation. All seven of the members whom Lambertson had accused had signed affidavits swearing that they were not communists, and Lytell believed them. The Committee, however, did not respond to his request at this point.¹¹

The Equity members who protested the organization's attempts to police the ideologies of its constituents and who were accused over the course of the 1940s and 1950s of being communists—people like Sam Jaffe, Philip Loeb, and Ossie Davis—

⁸ Council motion, July 9, 1940, folder 6.34, Actors' Equity Records; "Equity Denies Reds Sit on Ruling Board," *New York Times*, July 10, 1940.

⁹ "Refusal to Revive WPA Theatre Laid to Red Rule of Actor Unions," *New York Times*, July 9, 1940.

¹⁰ Cogley, et al.

¹¹ *Ibid*; see also "Dies Inquiry Asked by Equity on Reds," *New York Times*, July 24, 1940.

indeed were, if not actual members, quite close to the Party. I say this not to disparage them, but rather to provide a backdrop for the analysis that follows. In the face of accusations of subversion and even treason, theatre artists argued for the importance of self-expression. In doing so, they both drew on Constitutional rights to free speech *and* helped to develop some of the language of authenticity, which held that self-revelation was an inherently anti-fascist act. In making this argument, Equity members drew on their participation in anti-fascist Popular Front radicalism to contribute to a discourse of authenticity that by the 1960s clearly distinguished the New Left from the Old.

The vast majority of Equity members had never supported American neutrality in World War Two, and thus it is not surprising that, by the fall of 1941, their position was in line with the Communist Party, which had reversed its stance in the wake of Germany's June invasion of the Soviet Union. Many Americans felt the same way. It was against this background that the Stop Film Censorship Committee, which took direct aim at the subcommittee appointed within the U.S. Senate's Interstate Commerce Committee to investigate so-called propaganda within the film industry, was formed. The 1941 establishment of the Senate subcommittee was engineered largely by isolationist senators Burton K. Wheeler, a Democrat from Montana and the chair of the committee; Gerald Nye, a North Dakota Republican who had previously chaired the committee investigating—and ultimately condemning as profit-driven—U.S. involvement in World War One; and Idaho Democrat D. Worth Clark. Subcommittee members believed that the film industry was leading the U.S. toward intervention in World War Two, which had been raging in Europe for two years.

Enraged at this perceived censorship, members of the film industry and their labor allies quickly organized the Stop Film Censorship Committee, an independent organization of artists and labor activists the membership of which overlapped considerably with Equity's. The introductory letter the group sent to potentially interested parties claimed that the Senate subcommittee represented not only censorship but also was "an anti-administration publicity stunt" that would "breed religious and racial discord," including anti-Semitism. Founding committee members and signers of the letter included not only representatives of various artists' leagues but also Thomas J. Lyons and Thomas Murtha, presidents of the New York State Federation of Labor and the Central Trades and Labor Council of New York, respectively.¹²

Together, Equity and the anti-censorship committee promulgated a resolution condemning the Senate subcommittee. Its true intent, they argued, was "to block the production of anti-Nazi motion pictures" and enact "censorship on the free expression of American culture." The subcommittee's investigations would "breed religious and racial discord" and "destroy the unity of the vast American people who support the foreign policy of the nation," which by September of 1941 lacked little more than a formal declaration of war. In no uncertain terms, the resolution announced "that we hereby condemn the actions of the subcommittee as an immediate threat to free thought, free

¹² Letter to Paul Dullzell from Frank Gillmore, President, Associated Actors and Artistes of America; Thomas J. Lyons, President, New York State Federation of Labor; Thomas Murtha, President, Central Trades and Labor Council of New York; and Elmer Rice, President, Dramatists Guild, September 25, 1941, folder 7.27, Actors' Equity Records.

speech and to the very fundamentals of liberty upon which our great nation was founded, and strongly recommend that this inquiry be stopped.”¹³

Equity and the anti-censorship committee quickly began searching for allies and planning public events. They wrote letters to potentially sympathetic senators including New York Democrat Robert F. Wagner, a longtime labor ally, and Ernest McFarland, an Arizona Democrat who in the future would play a key role in the drafting and passage of the 1944 G.I. Bill. They urged both AFL- and CIO-affiliated unions to adopt resolutions similar to theirs, and they planned a mass rally to be held at Madison Square Garden. They received some positive feedback, if little concrete action, on the first two fronts, but the third effort seems to have been aborted. Originally planned for early October, the rally was to feature a coterie of Hollywood stars such as Charlie Chaplin; politicians Wendell Wilkie, Al Smith, and others; and labor activists including AFL president William Green. Fundraising for the event continued at least until late December, but it seems never to have taken place, perhaps because debates over intervention had by that point been rendered moot by the entry of the U.S. into World War Two following the attack on Pearl Harbor.¹⁴

Nonetheless, action against the Senate subcommittee functioned as an important rehearsal for the more protracted struggles that followed World War Two. It gave Equity and its allies an opportunity not only to practice mobilizing their base, but also to test the efficacy of a discourse of resistance based on freedom of expression as a fundamental

¹³ Council Resolution, September 16, 1941, folder 7.27, Actors' Equity Records; Plan for Action against the Senate Subcommittee Now Investigating the Motion Picture Industry, 1941, folder 7.27, Actors' Equity Records.

¹⁴ Plan for Action against the Senate Subcommittee Now Investigating the Motion Picture Industry, 1941, folder 7.27, Actors' Equity Records.

American right. As actress Tallulah Bankhead put it, “The Wheeler Nye Senatorial committee...outrages democracy...Theirs is a flag-rant fascist attempt to deny the people of stage, screen, and radio their inherent unassailable right to speak what is in their hearts and in their minds.” Mady Christians, who had starred in the Broadway version of Lillian Hellman’s 1941 play *Watch on the Rhine* and would be blacklisted after World War Two, agreed; as she argued, “one of the most important functions of the artist today is to express the anti-fascist feeling of the great majority of the American people and of our government... We must preserve our freedom of expression if we are to function as a democracy.”¹⁵ In this way, Bankhead, Christians, and others not only echoed the progressives who protested World War One-era crackdowns on civil liberties but also drew on their own experiences as Popular Front radicals opposed to fascism.

Similar themes characterized the response of Equity and its allies to a February 1945 decision by the New York City License Commissioner to close the play *Trio* on obscenity grounds. Anticipating a pattern that would mark almost all of their responses to blacklisting, the resolution passed by Equity Council in response to the decision condemned both obscenity and censorship. What the Council resented in this particular case was not shutting down a play that “violates decency,” but rather the unilateral decision to do so without input from others. As Paul Dullzell, who by that point had moved from President to Executive Secretary of the organization, wrote in a telegram to Mayor Fiorello H. LaGuardia that same week, “Equity does not approve or endorse the production of any salacious play or one that violates decency, but it does insist in following the proper procedures called for by due process of law and strongly objects to

¹⁵ Statements Supporting the Work of the Stop Film Censorship Committee, 1941, folder 7.27, Actors’ Equity Records.

any such arbitrary action as has been taken recently by the license commissioner in the case of the play *Trio*.” Dullzell did not hesitate to draw on the anti-fascist and patriotic sentiments so powerful in the closing months of World War Two, imploring LaGuardia not to allow public officials “to set themselves above the courts and proper legal procedure by exercising unwarranted dictatorial authority[,] which is one of the things that the United Nations and our American men and women in service are fighting to eliminate throughout the world.”¹⁶

LaGuardia, however, was unmoved. In his response to Dullzell, he insisted that it was legal procedures, and not “the character of the play,” that caused the License Commissioner to shut it down. As the law stood, the License Commissioner had unilateral power to reject a play’s license application, exactly what had happened in the *Trio* case. To LaGuardia, the legal justification for the commissioner’s decision, and not whether the decision was based on perceived obscenity, was what mattered. Based on Dullzell’s stated opposition to obscenity, LaGuardia encouraged Equity to work with the city to develop methods by which objectionable productions could be quickly identified and shut down.¹⁷

This solution was unacceptable to Equity and its allies, who proposed a variety of methods for protesting the mayor’s suggestion. Broadway producer Howard Lindsay encouraged Equity to take the fight to its audiences. As he wrote to the Council, “We can, if we must, address every audience, every performance, every week until the question is resolved whether they are willing to have one man impose upon all the

¹⁶ Council Resolution, February 27, 1945, folder 7.51, Actors’ Equity Records; Paul Dullzell to Fiorello H. LaGuardia, February 28, 1945, folder 7.51, Actors’ Equity Records.

¹⁷ Fiorello H. LaGuardia to Paul Dullzell, February 28, 1945, folder 7.51, Actors’ Equity Records.

citizens of New York his personal taste as to what they are to be permitted, or not permitted, to see in our theatre.” Two days later, the Council endorsed the letter unanimously. Equity also discovered that they were not alone in protesting LaGuardia’s intransigence; groups like the Lower Midtown Manhattan Committee for Citizens Action and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) had also taken up the cause. As Frances Simon, chairperson of the Committee for Citizens Action, wrote to LaGuardia, “Censorship by edict of one man is abhorrent to the American people. It is in its own way, a part of the entire scheme of tyranny against which we are fighting a global war.” With the help of legal counsel Osmond K. Fraenkel, Equity, the ACLU, and others were able in March to convince LaGuardia to support legislation that would deprive the license commissioner of what they believed to be arbitrary powers. The resulting legislation, however, failed to live up to their hopes.¹⁸

Taken from the very beginning and the very end of World War Two, the incidents discussed above reveal much about Equity’s attitude toward censorship. In short, Equity rejected censorship not only because they believed that intervening in World War Two was the morally correct thing to do, as in their alliance with the Stop Film Censorship Committee; not only because censorship threatened to deprive members of the art world of their livelihoods, as in the *Trio* incident; but also for the same reason that much of the liberal public rejected it: it smacked of fascism. They saw the distinction between the United States and Nazi Germany—and, later, the Stalinist Soviet Union—as resting on

¹⁸ Howard Lindsay to the Council, March 2, 1945, folder 7.51, Actors’ Equity Records; Paul Dullzell to Howard Lindsay, March 6, 1945, folder 7.51, Actors’ Equity Records; Frances Simon to Fiorello H. LaGuardia, March 10, 1945, folder 7.51, Actors’ Equity Records; Osmond K. Fraenkel, Report, March, 1945, folder 7.51, Actors’ Equity Records.

the ability of its citizens to freely express themselves, and thus saw censorship as fundamentally undemocratic and un-American.

The emphasis placed on free speech and expression, however, also cut in a different direction. Equity refused to forbid its members from accepting employment in Jim Crow theatres or from individuals who practiced blacklisting, citing each member's ability to choose for her- or himself. Members who favored racial segregation also argued that the organization's attempts at integration actually inhibited freedom of thought and expression and thus furthered a fascist agenda. Finally, in a milieu that privileged unbridled free expression, the decision to keep one's (presumably communist) political beliefs private was seen as particularly suspect, resulting in a culture of surveillance and coerced exposure. Self-expression was thus a malleable discourse that could be bent to serve a variety of political positions, and one that would have an even more prominent place in the union's internal politics after World War Two. Not just a right, self-expression could at times become a requirement.

One of the first incidents to illustrate the charged relationship between postwar politics and freedom of expression erupted over the actions of anti-communist Equity member Frank Fay. Vocal anti-communism was a vexing problem for Equity, for at its extremes it was not a sentiment shared by the majority of members. In the immediate postwar years, the organization actually took steps to limit the expression of such sentiments. Certainly by 1947, though, and increasingly after that point, Equity was more inclined to see anti-communism as a form of expression that deserved protection. The Frank Fay incident fell into the former category.

In October of 1945, Fay insisted that Equity investigate an anti-Catholic “Red rally” in which several fellow members had taken part. In response, the Council voted formally to reprimand Fay. The response from membership was overwhelmingly in favor of the Council’s actions. One member framed his support for the Council’s decision in terms of patriotism, while actress Aline MacMahon claimed that Fay was “conducting a smear campaign against all of us who have a liberal point of view.” She argued that Fay should be not only censured but also asked to resign from the Council. Drama critic Richard Watts, Jr. took these concerns one step further, urging Paul Dullzell to “show Frank Fay he is alone in his admiration of Francos [*sic*] fascism.” Even Equity legal counsel Paul N. Turner gave his full support, given his belief that Fay was intentionally trying to ruin the reputations of fellow union members, an action forbidden under the Equity constitution.¹⁹

The following year, Equity displayed more discomfort with vocal anti-communism. On October 10, 1946, a group of Equity members referring to themselves as Anti-Communist Actors signed a pledge vowing to rid the organization of its supposed communist influence. They promised “to work against any individual or group of individuals within our Association, who, by work or action, advocates the overthrow of the government and/or the disgrace of the profession” and to “‘clean our own house’—to free and rid our organization, the Council included, of any such individuals or groups, so

¹⁹Mr. Connelly to Paul Dullzell, December, 1945, folder 8.4, Actors’ Equity Records; Aline MacMahon to Paul Dullzell, December 10, 1945, folder 8.4, Actors’ Equity Records; Richard Watts, Jr., to Paul Dullzell, December 14, 1945, folder 8.4, Actors’ Equity Records; Paul N. Turner to the Council, November 23, 1945, folder 8.4, Actors’ Equity Records.

that the stigma of press and governmental agency designation as ‘communist controlled’ may be removed.”²⁰

The leadership of Equity was not pleased with this development. Since at least the 1930s, they had been keen to prevent members from belonging to other groups representing actors and actresses, passing a resolution to this effect in 1936. In September of 1946, one month before the Anti-Communist Actors’ pledge, they forbade members from using all or part of Equity’s name. More controversially, they considered taking disciplinary action against the members who had signed the October pledge.²¹

In response, members who had signed the pledge contacted a lawyer, Godfrey P. Schmidt, who had previously been a voice of dissent in the Frank Fay case. Though not formally hired by this group, Schmidt wasted no time in writing to Equity president Clarence Derwent to voice his displeasure. In his view, the Anti-Communist Actors were being attacked because they “exercized [*sic*] their rights under the American Constitution to sign a declaration or proclamation.” Schmidt thus considered the charges being considered against them “laughable.” He accused Equity of being controlled by “Party-liners,” threatened to organize a council of lawyers to defend the group if disciplinary action against them were pursued, and expressed his disbelief that “honest and sincere Americans in the trade union movement can be harassed for their opposition to Communism as a philosophy of life and government.” Derwent, the Council, and ultimately the membership were not intimidated by this threat; while they seem to have dropped the idea of disciplinary action, they did pass a December resolution specifically

²⁰ Anti-Communist Actors pledge, October 10, 1946, folder 8.33, Actors’ Equity Records.

²¹ Anti-Blacklisting Committee Report, 1953, folder 23.33, Actors’ Equity Records; Godfrey P. Schmidt to Clarence Derwent, October 23, 1946, folder 8.33, Actors’ Equity Records.

forbidding membership in the Anti-Communist Actors and/or the related Actors Anti-Communist League.²²

The culture of Equity, however, was clearly beginning to shift. The formation of the Anti-Communist Actors signaled that some members were displeased with Equity's reluctance to take a stand against communism. That same year, a significant number of members petitioned the Council to remove actor Sam Jaffe from his committee position, which involved helping members make the transition from junior to senior membership, due to his supposedly subversive activities. These included his involvement with the American League for Peace and Democracy, a pacifist group deemed subversive by the Department of Justice; his support for cooperation with the Soviet Union in August 1939 (though before the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact) and for opening the second front in 1942, as Stalin had begged the U.S. to do; his participation in the Reichstag Fire Trial Anniversary Committee, of which Communist Party U.S.A. leader Earl Browder was also a member; his defense of self-identified communist and City College instructor (and fellow City College graduate) Morris U. Schappes, who was serving a prison term for perjury in connection with New York state investigations into the communist influence in education; his support of the magazine *Social Work Today*; and his membership in various "front" organizations, including the American Committee for Yugoslav Relief, which his opponents claimed was "an integral part of [Yugoslav

²² Godfrey P. Schmidt to Clarence Derwent, October 23, 1946, folder 8.33, Actors' Equity Records; Anti-Blacklisting Committee Report, 1953, folder 23.33, Actors' Equity Records. Schmidt, a Fordham law professor and legal counsel to New York's Cardinal Spellman, apparently carried a grudge against Equity for many years. In 1954 he became president of Aware, Inc., an anti-communist group that targeted Equity and encouraged a new HUAC investigation into the entertainment industry. The following year, HUAC was happy to comply.

communist leader] Tito's fifth column in the United States."²³ However, no action was taken against Jaffee, who went on to be a vocal opponent of Equity's perceived concessions to the Cold War culture of fear.²⁴

The following year, 1947, marked a decisive shift in how Equity dealt with the question of communism. While the leadership never endorsed wholeheartedly the positions held by Frank Fay and the Anti-Communist Actors and would, starting in 1950 and repeatedly from that point on, declare themselves against the blacklist, their policies increasingly denied members' rights to keep their political beliefs private. Theirs increasingly became a culture of surveillance in which the failure to express oneself became evidence of potential subversive tendencies.²⁵

In a decision symptomatic of this changing culture, the Equity Council decided on September 9, 1947, to begin requiring anti-communist affidavits from officers, representatives, and employees (not the general membership). This decision came several months after Harry Truman initiated his own loyalty program and Congress passed the Taft-Hartley Act, which made Wagner Act protections dependent on acquiescence to anti-communist affidavits, over the president's veto. It may also have been influenced by the announcement made in July by Congressman George Anthony Dondero, a Michigan Republican best known for his insistence on the pervasive connection between communism and the arts, that he was about to embark upon an

²³ The 1933 fire in the Berlin Reichstag building, the meeting place of the German Parliament, led to the conviction and execution of communist Marinus Van der Lubbe and was a key moment in the Nazi Party's consolidation of power.

²⁴ Petition to Remove Sam Jaffee, 1946, folder 9.3, Actors' Equity Records.

²⁵ This change in policy cannot really be attributed to changes in the Council's composition, as only ten of the body's fifty members were up for re-election each year. Baar, "What Has My Union Done for Me?," 445.

investigation of Equity. Dondero insisted that “fellow travellers” had gained control of the Council through “treachery” by denying membership the “opportunity to make a free choice.” He spoke in support of the “loyal Americans” of the Actors’ Equity Anti-Communist League, declaring that they were “prepared to challenge the totalitarian methods of the reds and fellow travellers who now control, in a subtle manner, the Equity organization.” In his official response, Equity president Clarence Derwent scoffed at Dondero’s “absurd and preposterous statement,” insisting that those trying to root out the communist influence in Equity were “jousting at windmills. I know of no Communism for them to fight.”²⁶

Away from the press, however, Equity seemed keen to provide proof that would dispel Dondero’s accusations. On the one hand, they passed a resolution, likely intended to broaden their prohibition on membership in the Anti-Communist Actors and/or the Actors Anti-Communist League, forbidding members from belonging to other groups trying to influence Equity’s policies.²⁷ More significantly, as mentioned above, the Council voted in favor of a resolution, introduced by actor, dramatist, producer, and director Elliot Nugent and St. Louis (Mo.) Municipal Opera Co. production director John Kennedy, to begin requiring anti-communist affidavits from certain groups. In the resulting affidavits, officers, representatives, and employees swore to knowledge of Article II, Section 12 of the Equity Constitution and By-Laws, which forbade the same individuals from belonging to the Communist Party (or other groups deemed “inimical to and conflicting with the best interests of this Association and its legitimate purposes”). It also echoed the Smith Act in its insistence that “any person who publicly, knowingly or

²⁶ Associated Press article, July 23, 1947, folder 10.10, Actors’ Equity Records.

²⁷ Anti-Blacklisting Committee Report, 1953, folder 23.33, Actors’ Equity Records.

willfully advocates, advises, teaches or abets the doctrine, duty, necessity, desirability or propriety of overthrowing the Government of the United States or of any State or political subdivision thereof by force, violence or unlawful means” could not hold a leadership position within the organization.²⁸ The affidavit itself demanded that each signer

...hereby declare and affirm that I am not a member of the Communist Party of any country or any political sub-division of the Communist Party of any country; that I am not a member of the Fascist Party of any country; nor am I a member of any parties, organizations or groups which have adopted resolutions or platforms presently in force declared by the Council of this Association to be inimical to and conflicting with the best interest of this Association and of its legitimate purposes.²⁹

Even before the Kennedy-Nugent resolution passed, its contents were controversial, with both opponents and supporters using ideas of Americanism, anti-Americanism, and free speech and expression to justify their positions. Ultimately, though, the resolution’s detractors proved to be in the minority, both in the Council and the membership at large, who with few exceptions expressed enthusiastic support for the resolution and resulting affidavits.

In a lengthy letter written to the Council while they were considering the resolution, Sam Jaffee voiced his displeasure at a resolution that proposed “to bring the whispers to the open” and obligated Council members “to stand up and be counted as American constitutionalists or Stalinistor [*sic*] Francoites.” Jaffee considered himself an American constitutionalist, and it was precisely on these grounds that he objected to the resolution. In his view, the framers of the U.S. Constitution would have recoiled from the very idea of loyalty oaths. While Jaffee stated that he would be happy not only to

²⁸ Article II, Section 12, Actors’ Equity Constitution and By-Laws, folder 10.10, Actors’ Equity Records.

²⁹ “In the Matter of Actors’ Equity Association,” 1947, folder 10.10, Actors’ Equity Records.

pledge his support for, but also to fight and die in defense of, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, he would

refuse to subscribe to any substitute test of Americanism no matter how well intentioned. I refuse to abandon the old criterion regardless of name-calling or consequences. I realize I have taken the harder course and that it would have been truthful as well as easier to swear that I am no Stalinist, Communist, or Francoite, but I feel that if I had done so I would have betrayed a basic tenet of Americanism, namely that our democracy permits of all climates of political opinion. Conversely, any limiting of political freedom, whether it manifests itself in keeping a person from being a Councillor or in keeping him from any job whatsoever, is contrary to the American ideal and borrows from and borders on totalitarianism, the very idea which the Messrs Kennedy and Nugent abhor, I am sure.

This atmosphere of paranoia, Jaffee argued, had already led to a litany of “un-American and totalitarian” infringements on free speech, including the Taft-Hartley Act, President Truman’s loyalty program, and the actions of the HUAC. Rather than continuing these encroachments on personal expression, Jaffee would have preferred communism to be allowed to compete in the marketplace of ideas, where it would compete with and, he had no doubt, be defeated by superior ideologies. Drawing on Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.’s, famous dissent in the case regarding the World War One-era Sedition Act, Jaffee argued that “we can meet any political idea in the open market in free competition because we feel that we have the best bill of goods to sell. To desert this stand because of expediency or hysteria is to desert basic American principles. These are not times for less democracy but for more democracy.” In this way, Jaffee seamlessly integrated market ideals, free speech, and democracy into a brew called Americanism, arguing that encroachments on any of these would inevitably lead to totalitarianism. As he put it, “I am ready to stand up and be counted as one who is disloyal to your resolution

because of my loyalty to the only criterion of Americanism: the Constitution and the Bill of Rights.”³⁰

Actress and Council member Edith Atwater expressed similar fears that the resolution represented a move toward fascism. She saw it as “a violation of our Civil Rights” and “an interference of freedom of that [*sic*] and expression.” To Jaffee’s arguments she added the idea that artists had a special responsibility to curb these infringements on self-expression, insisting that making concessions to a culture of fear would render them less able to fight censorship. As she put it, “the very arguments being used to sanction the resolution under discussion are the same which will be used by those favoring censorship[;] therefore[,] we must arm ourselves for our defense rather than disarm ourselves by endorsing [*sic*] this resolution[, which] can only be interpreted as meaning we approve curtailing further Civil Rights of man.”³¹

Of course, the resolution had its supporters, starting with the men who introduced it. Elliot Nugent’s self-described reasons for demanding the affidavits were complex; as he wrote to Phillip Loeb (who had allied himself with Sam Jaffee in the fight against the resolution and five years later would find himself blacklisted), he actually believed that “there is a place in any labor union (if this union chooses to accept them) for *openly avowed* Communists, and logically, I suppose, even for openly avowed Fascists. I *do not*

³⁰ Sam Jaffee to the Council, 1947, folder 10.10, Actors’ Equity Records. Jaffee’s ancillary arguments also drew on ideas of Americanism; for example, he accused Elliot Nugent of being motivated by his displeasure at Equity’s decision to take a strong stand regarding the integration of the National Theatre in Washington, D.C.: “Could it be, Elliot, that the Association’s National Theatre stand has peeved you as a member of the committee who has other ideas of handling it? I refuse to believe that, for it was a stand of Equity and justice, a stand against discrimination because of race, creed, or color, a stand against the phoney argument of jobs and a principle of first and second-class citizenship as opposed to the principles of Americanism.”

³¹ Edith Atwater, Statement to Council, 1947, folder 10.10, Actors’ Equity Records. Atwater also feared that the resolution was a de facto endorsement of the Taft-Hartley Act, which Equity had gone on record as opposing.

believe that there is any place in any labor union or organization *or in the United States of America* for anyone who refuses to say what he is and what he believes in.” Nugent reserved his greatest contempt not for communism as a philosophy but for the perceived secrecy of communists. He was, moreover, untroubled by the persecution that admitted communists would face, arguing that this was a just punishment for espousing “an ideology admittedly hostile to the American democratic system.”³²

Ultimately, even Sam Jaffee signed the affidavit, albeit unhappily, for he considered it “a subversion of a basic American tenet of freedom: ‘the freedom of ideas.’”³³ He was not alone in his protest; the fears he shared with Edith Atwater and others were expressed most bluntly by a group identifying themselves only as “For the Right of the Actor to Be Free and Express. And for the Constitution of America.” In forcing members to disavow communism, this group held, Equity was “falling in line with Fascist tactics.” They considered the affidavits, which took away members’ “freedom to think out things for themselves,” to be “foreign to Americanism of what this Country was founded on and for.” To this group, these encroachments on civil liberties were morally repugnant, unconstitutional, and wholly anathema to the implicit mission shared by all artists. As they put it, “actors—THAT IS TRUE ARTISTS not Pseudo—are free and generous and broad[. They] want freedom and give that right to their fellow men[.] Curb him of his right to think for himself[,] then you undermine his whole attitude and therefore restrain...his work.” Like Atwater—and, in a different way, Dondero,

³² Elliot Nugent to Phillip Loeb, September 8, 1947, folder 10.10, Actors’ Equity Records, emphasis in original. To Nugent, communism was indistinguishable from Soviet totalitarianism; as he explained, “when I say ‘Communist,’ I mean a worker for Stalin.”

³³ Sam Jaffee to Paul Dullzell, September 28, 1947, folder 10.10, Actors’ Equity Records. Jaffee was happier to note that the AFL Executive Council had recently defeated a resolution similar to the one that passed the Equity Council.

HUAC, and others—this group believed that the arts were necessarily implicated in any discussion of free speech and expression.³⁴

Otherwise, however, the views of the anonymous organization were exceptional. Most of the letters that poured in from members in response to the Council's decision expressed enthusiastic support, a marked change from the majority of responses to the Frank Fay incident a mere two years earlier. Between 1945 and 1947, a significant number of Equity members, along with millions of other Americans, came to see communism as a serious, even imminent, threat to the American way of life.

Equity spent much of 1948 and 1949 in a holding pattern, reluctant to take concrete action either in support of or against the mounting culture of fear. Despite the urging of both the ACLU and individual Equity members, the union refused to take an official stance on the Mundt-Nixon bill (ultimately the McCarran Internal Security Act, passed in 1950 over President Truman's veto), which required so-called communist front organizations to register with the government.³⁵ So, too, were they slow to respond to the threat that blacklisting posed to their organization. In April 1949, member Peter Lawrence implored his fellow Equity members to issue an anti-red-baiting statement, citing media and HUAC scrutiny and a general anti-union atmosphere. Equity refused to take action at this time, and the Council went so far as to officially disapprove of a subsequent motion by Lawrence to support those indicted under the Smith Act, which prosecutors had begun to use against Communist Party members. The unofficial response, which included an anonymous letter arguing that Lawrence and the Council

³⁴“ For the Right of the Actor to Be Free and Express. And for the Constitution of America” to Actors' Equity, November 27, 1947, folder 10.10, Actors' Equity Records.

³⁵ American Civil Liberties Union, Memorandum on S. 2311 and on H.R. 7595, folder 15.33, Actors' Equity Records.

members who agreed with him did not “deserve to live in the sunshine of the greatest nation in the world, the United States,” was even harsher.³⁶

By 1950, however, Equity realized that blacklisting was a threat too great to ignore. The immediate precipitating factor for this change of heart was the firing of actress Jean Muir from the television show *The Aldrich Family* after her name appeared in the publication *Red Channels*, a guide identifying supposed communists. In response, Equity passed a resolution condemning both blacklisting in general and specifically the Jean Muir incident. However, before the resolution even mentioned blacklisting, its framers took great pains to detail Equity’s opposition to communism and fascism and its support for government attempts to stamp out these ideologies. Indeed, the reason they gave for opposing blacklisting was that it “improperly assumed the functions of Government.” In opposing blacklisting on the basis that it usurped a legitimate function of the government, the resolution also ratified the government’s right to conduct inquiries into “subversive” activities. Equity’s ambivalence toward blacklisting did not end there; within a month of passing this resolution, two more—one barring Equity members from working for people who engaged in blacklisting and another deeming blacklisting an unfair labor practice—failed to pass.³⁷

In the fall of 1951, membership and the Council faced off in the first of two serious disagreements regarding blacklisting and communism. In January of that year, in a debate over including political creed as a protected category under the Equity

³⁶ Peter Lawrence to Equity members, April 21, 1949, folder 15.8, Actors’ Equity Records; Peter Lawrence to Equity members, September 3, 1949, folder 15.8, Actors’ Equity Records; Angus Duncan to Peter Lawrence, September 22, 1949, folder 15.8, Actors’ Equity Records; Anonymous letter, folder 15.8, Actors’ Equity Records.

³⁷ Council Resolution, September 12, 1950, folder 15.32, Actors’ Equity Records; Membership and Council Resolution, September 22, 1950, folder 21.6, Actors’ Equity Records; Membership and Council Resolution, October 10, 1950, folder 21.6, Actors’ Equity Records.

constitution (no action on the matter was taken at the time), Council members admitted that, despite the 1950 resolution, they had not yet taken a strong stance on blacklisting.³⁸ In September, membership attempted to rectify this, passing their own anti-blacklisting resolution by a decisive margin of 220 to twenty-four. They noted that, since the Jean Muir incident a year earlier, blacklisting had only increased. While the practice constituted a threat to the livelihood of all artists, the resolution addressed with particular alarm “that this overall Blacklist against our members, Negro and White, constitutes a double Blacklist, an added burden for our Negro members, as they have always been discriminated against in terms of employment.” They resolved to work with the League of New York Theatres to secure a clause in their basic agreement deeming blacklisting an unfair labor practice, essentially forbidding members from working in theatres that practiced blacklisting.³⁹

Despite the enormous support this resolution found within the general membership, the Council rejected it by a large majority. Chief among its several problems with the resolution was “in the endorsement which might be inferred from it, of all political beliefs and/or activities, including those which are subversive.” In other words, the Council did not feel that the membership resolution sufficiently condemned communism (as, indeed, it did not).⁴⁰ The Council’s substitute resolution, like its 1950 resolution in the wake of the Jean Muir incident, condemned communism before it mentioned blacklisting, citing Equity’s strong record of opposition to “Communism,

³⁸ Councillors’ Remarks Re: Seven Proposed Amendments, January 2, 1951, folder 19.6, Actors’ Equity Records.

³⁹ “The Council Deals with Blacklisting,” November, 1951, folder 18.17, Actors’ Equity Records.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Fascism, and any and all other forms of subversive acts and ideologies” and support for government inquiries into these matters. In this way, the Council followed the lead of the U.S. government, which in its attempts to outlaw the Communist Party conflated ideologies with acts. Councilors did, however, identify blacklisting as “a form of anti-union discrimination” as well as a violation of “the time-honored American principle that an accused person has the inherent and vested right to a just and fair hearing.” They pledged to support members who were falsely accused and appointed a committee to gather information and recommend further action (which the membership resolution also did). In addition to its insistent anti-communism, the Council resolution differed from the membership version in its silence on the issue of racial discrimination and its refusal to take concrete steps toward officially identifying blacklisting as an unfair labor practice.⁴¹

Despite acknowledgment that blacklisting was a union issue—in 1952, the Council endorsed a plan called for by the newly-formed Blacklisting Committee to form an inter-union committee and encourage organizations in related fields to pass resolutions similar to theirs—the Council was intransigent on the issue of blacklisting as an unfair labor practice. They reiterated their earlier stance the next year, when actor Philip Loeb was fired from the television show *The Goldbergs* after his name appeared in *Red Channels*. Membership quickly passed a resolution condemning this as anti-union discrimination and thus as an unfair labor practice, demanding that both the show and the network (NBC) be added to Equity’s list of unfair employers. The Council voted

⁴¹ Council Resolution, November 13, 1951, folder 18.17, Actors’ Equity Records.

unanimously to condemn Loeb's firing but refused to add *The Goldbergs* or NBC to the unfair list.⁴²

Nonetheless, 1952 marked perhaps the last opportunity for membership and the Council to find common ground in the fight against blacklisting. The best chance came in the fall, when an anti-blacklisting resolution passed by membership received the enthusiastic support of the Blacklisting Committee and its chair, actress Florida Friebus.⁴³ This resolution condemned blacklisting on the grounds not only that it deprived its victims of the ability to earn a living, but also that it restricted freedom of expression, arguing that "these forces who seek to determine by censorship and blacklist who may perform, what they may perform, and under what conditions they may perform, are depriving the American people of their right to entertainment of their own free choice."⁴⁴ Florida Friebus expanded on these themes in her statement to the Council in support of this resolution and against those who wanted to extend its protections only to those falsely accused of being communists. Americans, she argued, were quick to deplore censorship when they learned of it taking place in other countries, "point[ing] with renewed pride to their own land of liberty, where art and the theatre are free." She could not understand, then, why they would tolerate censorship in their own country. She defended the rights of both falsely accused and actual communists to earn a living, imploring her listeners to "in our fight against Communism let us not do exactly what the

⁴² Council Meeting, January 8, 1952, folder 21.3, Actors' Equity Records; Membership Resolution, January 11, 1952, folder 21.5, Actors' Equity Records; Louis M. Simon to George Heller, National Executive Secretary, Television Authority, January 17, 1952, folder 21.5, Actors' Equity Records; "Equity Refuses to Fight for Loeb," *New York Journal-American*, January 17, 1952, folder 21.5, Actors' Equity Records.

⁴³ Interestingly, Friebus was also a strong internationalist; her 1954 essay "Why the United States Needs the United Nations" was presented on Human Rights Day and won the John Golden Award.

⁴⁴ Resolution Passed at First Quarterly Meeting 1952-1953, September 16, 1952, folder 21.6, Actors' Equity Records.

Communists would have us do...get rid of our civil liberties.” Failing to protect admitted communists from the blacklist, she argued, would curb freedom of expression in the same way that communism itself did. In the 1930s, she wrote,

when Communism was having a kind of fad in this country it was presented to me as a way of bringing about my ideals of peace and well-being. I rejected it then, as I do now, because it demands among other things the giving up [of] the individual’s sacred right to think independently and freely. I want to protect this right forever, and that is why I will vote to keep our resolution as it stands, making no deviation from the principles contained ther[e]in.⁴⁵

It was not anti-communism itself, but rather the methods adhered to by some of its proponents, to which Friebus objected. As she put it, “adhering to American principles and government procedures is a much better way to fight Communism, than by means of blacklisting.”⁴⁶ Her individual views were shared by the majority of the Blacklisting Committee, which similarly urged the Council to approve the membership’s resolution.⁴⁷

Those opposed to blacklisting on anti-censorship grounds would also have shared the sentiments voiced in “Facts about Blacklist,” a pamphlet put out by writers and Equity members Walter Bernstein and Sam Moore in November 1952. According to the editors, the blacklist had driven 350 actors, writers, and directors out of radio and television in the past two years. In New York, one-third of Equity members had been blacklisted, a practice the editors denounced as “dirty” and “un-American.” Like Florida Friebus, they were opposed to blacklisting on the grounds that it deprived victims of their livelihood; however, they were far more seriously troubled by the ideological aims of the blacklist. In their words, “the blacklist...has a wider aim: to create in our country a

⁴⁵ Florida Friebus, Statement to Council, October 28, 1952, folder 21.3, Actors’ Equity Records.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Blacklisting Committee Report, November 31, 1952, folder 21.3, Actors’ Equity Records.

climate of repression, rather than a climate of freedom. This makes it a threat to *all* Americans, not just those in the entertainment industry. It is a direct warning to all Americans to conform or lose their jobs.” Accordingly, “Facts about Blacklist” was aimed at individuals who “neither want nor will tolerate this kind of conformity.” This report, however, sheds light on at least two similarities among those who promulgated and challenged the Cold War status quo. Both groups saw that freedom of thought and expression were at stake, with communism and censorship the respective villains. Both groups, moreover, saw secrecy as the problem and exposure as the solution. On the one hand, McCarthy, Dondero, and HUAC hoped to expose the conspiracy they saw lurking in the secretiveness of the Communist Party. By revealing so-called subversives, they believed, they would defuse the threat. On the other hand, as “Facts about Blacklist” put it, “the blacklist feeds on secrecy—once the shoddy conspiracy is brought into light, it can be examined, fought, and defeated.” Accordingly, their goal was to “expose its [the blacklist’s] workings, the people who cooperate with it, and the people behind it.”⁴⁸

If 1952 saw anti-blacklisting forces within Equity sharing a common, seemingly effective, language, it also portended a more ominous direction for the organization. It was perhaps the first time, for example, that ideological restrictions for general membership—as opposed to Council members—were considered. This consideration took the form of a resolution that, had it passed, would have barred members from belonging to the Communist Party or any other “group or organization whose stated aims or principles, methods or policies may affect the professional relations of actors and actresses to each other or with their employers, and whose stated methods may bring

⁴⁸ Walter Bernstein and Sam Moore, “Facts about Blacklist,” November 1, 1952, folder 21.3, Actors’ Equity Records.

harm to their fellow Equity members.” There is no evidence that the proposed resolution ever came to a vote, but events the following year made clear that its contents did not reflect the sentiments of the majority of members.⁴⁹

1953 marked the climax of Equity’s debate over blacklisting. The year began promisingly enough, with the Council approving the anti-blacklisting resolution passed by the membership the previous fall. Additionally, the Council passed a resolution in support of the Ford Foundation’s Fund for the Republic, an anti-blacklisting, anti-censorship organization. It soon became clear, however, that the Council wished to take the organization in a different direction from the majority of its members. Even as they approved the membership’s anti-blacklisting resolution in January, the Council decided to start a file of the signed officers’ affidavits required by the Taft-Hartley Act; in September, they passed a resolution requiring “governing and administrative bodies” and employees to qualify under oath as non-totalitarian and non-communist. These measures, however, seem not to have added qualitatively to the requirements already on the books since 1947, perhaps adding new officers to the rolls but nothing more.⁵⁰

In a series of developments that began in the spring and grew through the summer and fall, the Council was also considering extending these non-totalitarian and non-communist requirements to the general membership. These attempts faced both popular and legal hurdles. In June, the Council asked membership to consider a resolution that would have barred from membership individuals belonging to the Communist Party or other so-called subversive groups. It was soundly defeated. The proposed rule changes

⁴⁹Membership Resolution, 1952, folder 21.6, Actors’ Equity.

⁵⁰Anti-Blacklisting Committee Report, 1953, folder 23.33, Actors’ Equity Records; Angus Duncan to Officers, January 22, 1953, folder 25.19, Actors’ Equity Records.

also faced opposition from Equity legal counsel Rebecca Brownstein, who pointed out that Equity would be overstepping its bounds in outlawing membership in the Communist Party, which was perfectly legal under U.S. law. Undeterred, the Council made two more attempts to get similar measures—one to include an anti-communist pledge in the membership application, and another to amend the Equity constitution to include an anti-totalitarian qualification—past the membership in September, to no avail. Finally, the Council decided to override the membership vote, deciding in October to require an anti-totalitarian qualification for all members. It read, “Council gives notice that any member who is proven by due process of law to be a member of the Communist Party, or any agency thereof, or any organization which seeks to overthrow the government of the United States by force or violence, or who is proven guilty of any subversive act, shall automatically be charged by the Association, by the writing of such finding, with conduct prejudicial to the Association and shall be subject to Article V of the By-Laws.”⁵¹

The Council faced a storm of protest over this decision, due both to its thwarting of the union’s usual democratic processes and to the contents of the rule itself. Even among councilors, the new measures were controversial. Actor, director, and Federal Theatre Project and U.S. Army veteran Joseph Anthony, who was a member of the committee appointed to draft a non-communist and/or non-totalitarian qualification for members although he disapproved of such action, argued that Council was usurping governmental authority in banning what the government did not and was engaging in

⁵¹ Report of the Committee to Consider the Proposed Resolution Calling for a Membership Anti-Totalitarian Qualification, 1953, folder 25.1, Actors’ Equity Records; Memo to Council, June 23, 1953, folder 25.1, Actors’ Equity Records; Rebecca Brownstein to Council, October 2, 1953, folder 25.1, Actors’ Equity Records; Membership Resolution, September 18, 1953, folder 25.1, Actors’ Equity Records; Proposed Constitutional Amendment, September 18, 1953, folder 25.1, Actors’ Equity Records; Report of Executive Secretary, Angus Duncan, to Quarterly Meeting, December 11, 1953, folder 25.15, Actors’ Equity Records.

coercion, discrimination, and police action.⁵² A fellow councilor, so avowedly anti-communist that he believed people proven to be communists or subversives should not be allowed to become American citizens, nonetheless disagreed with the Council's attempts to enforce new qualifications upon the general membership. He noted with alarm that, while Council votes were usually anonymous, their votes on this matter were recorded. He saw in this "a kind of plan which will separate [*sic*] the agreeers from the disagreeers with a distinct penalty to [be] leveled against the disagreeers if they do not happen to be in the majority at the time." The irony was that this perceived attempt to coerce conformity "basis [*sic*] it's [*sic*] claim to rightness on the fact that it is defending the philosophy of American govmt." Dissent, this Council member argued, was not the same as subversion, and in trying to conflate the two the Council was attacking a crucial part of the American political tradition.⁵³ Others went so far as to turn the language of subversion on its head, arguing that the measures under consideration were themselves subversive. As one Councilor cleverly noted, "to subvert, according to my dictionary, is to overthrow the foundation. The foundation of our government is the right to vote, and it is only to be denied to those who have been proven by due process of law, guilty of a crime." Once begun down the road toward limitations on freedom of expression, it would be difficult to stop:

If we start to take it [the right to vote] away from people who belong to certain [*sic*] organizations, which in themselves are allowed to exist under the law, what are we going to do about those who don't actually belong, but think and do the work of the organizations, and those who are not active but agree with them about certain things, and might use their vote in our union to accomplish those things.

⁵² Joseph Anthony, Statement to Council, June 23, 1953, folder 25.1, Actors' Equity Records.

⁵³ Statement to Council, 1953, folder 25.1, Actors' Equity Records.

You would lop off a great many members eventually, and you would have subverted democracy from its foundation.⁵⁴

As in previous disputes, certain Council members noted the particular responsibility placed on artists to defend freedom. According to member Mr. Hughes, “the theatre is the last stronghold in the Arts of freedom of thought, freedom of belief and freedom of expression. No one wants to see an impotent theatre ruled by fear.” Although avowedly anti-communist himself, he would “refuse to change my thoughts and beliefs on a subject because they happen to coincide with a fascist or communist line...If one continually shies away from thinking independently because one’s thinking is apt to parallel part of a doctrine then one becomes a puppet and is no longer of any use to himself or his fellowman.” He also drew on ideas of transparency, arguing that actual communists, who supposedly thrived on secrecy, would merely deny their involvement, leaving only the innocent to be hurt. Like many who shared his political orientation, Mr. Hughes would have preferred to “keep them out in the open where we can match our democratic ideas and ideals with theirs.” He ended his statement with a warning that explicitly connected freedom of thought and artistic censorship, stating, “I feel this is a knuckling under to McCarthy and the other book-burners who would suppress all thought that is opposed to theirs. If the purpose is to appease this element let me warn you that they will never be satisfied with this.”⁵⁵ His colleague Paul Ford, an Emmy and Tony Award-nominated actor, made the connection even more explicitly. Ford shared with Florida Friebus the belief that denying employment even to avowed communists was a form of discrimination. In his view, the proposed resolution was itself totalitarian and

⁵⁴ Memo to Council, June 23, 1953, folder 25.1, Actors’ Equity Records.

⁵⁵ Mr. Hughes’ statement, June 23, 1953, folder 25.1, Actors’ Equity Records.

undemocratic, and it was not worth it to sacrifice one's freedoms for a threat that may or may not come to fruition. His statement is most noteworthy, however, for his hope that Council members would live up to their special duties as artists. "Let us not put our union on this bandwagon," he urged,

We are a union of creative artists. Artists in all fields throughout history have been known for their independent thinking, their deviation from the conventional and the commonplace, yes and often their heresy. Let us stand for everyone's right to be himself and think as he likes right on up to the last if necessary. This is the courageous thing to do *now*—if we wish to set an example for others in this "land of the free and home of the brave."⁵⁶

In this way, those who challenged the excesses of McCarthyism argued that the qualities of a fine artist, namely the ability to think for and express oneself freely, were also the qualities of a good American citizen. This position also bore much in common with the anti-fascist Popular Front politics in which many of its proponents were steeped.

The September membership meeting that voted down the proposed new requirements featured more heated rhetoric, with members drawing on many of the same themes as dissenting Council members. As John Randolph, a Federal Theatre Project veteran then training at the Actors Studio, argued, the proposed changes were a form of appeasement to McCarthy and his allies and represented an irrevocable step down the road toward censorship and enforced conformity. Once a certain group or ideology was outlawed, he argued, "it becomes just a little easier to start expanding that ban until the accusations become WILDER and WILDER and no one is safe." One need only look at the last several decades, he urged his listeners, to learn this lesson well. To Randolph, these developments were themselves anti-American; as freedom of expression became increasingly circumscribed, "non-conformity becomes a crime, and in a country like ours,

⁵⁶ Paul Ford to Council, June 21, 1953, folder 25.1, Actors' Equity Association.

which grew great on freedom for all—religious and political—this, indeed, becomes just the opposite of Americanism in the truest, deepest sense of the word.” He feared that political disagreements “on F.D.R., or housing for veterans, or the Korean War, or John Foster Dulles, or jobs for Negro actors, or Joe McCarthy, or blacklisting” would turn into opportunities for false accusations.⁵⁷

When it was member Jon Polan’s turn to speak, he chose to read an excerpt from Columbia University professor Henry Steele Commager’s essay “Who Is Loyal to America?,” which first appeared in *Harper’s* in September 1947. Commager argued that the aim of Cold War hysteria was “not merely to frustrate Communism but to formulate a positive definition of Americanism, and a positive concept of loyalty.” As he saw it, these new definitions prized conformity above all else:

What is the new loyalty? It is, above all, conformity. It is the uncritical and unquestioning acceptance of America as it is—the political institutions, the social relationships, the economic practices. It rejects inquiry into the race question and socialized medicine, or public housing, or into the wisdom or validity of our foreign policy. It regards as particularly heinous any challenge to what is called “the system of private enterprise,” identifying that system with Americanism.⁵⁸

In Commager’s, and by extension Polan’s, mind, conformity was not only “narrow and restrictive,” but it was also downright un-American. It checked “freedom of thought and conscience” and choked the particular genius Commager saw in the heroes of American history, all of whom had been dissenters. “If our democracy is to flourish,” wrote Commager, “it must have criticism, if our government is to flourish it must have dissent.” He charged that “only totalitarian governments insist on conformity”; by contrast, Americans had every reason to welcome “nonconformity, for they know that the

⁵⁷ John Randolph, statement to membership, September 18, 1953, folder 25.15, Actors’ Equity Records.

⁵⁸ Jon Polan, statement to membership, September 18, 1953, folder 25.15, Actors’ Equity Records.

American genius is nonconformist.” Ultimately, Commager argued, “every effort to confine Americanism to a single pattern, to constrain it to a single formula, is disloyalty to everything that is valid in Americanism.” Clearly, Polan intended his statement to indicate that the Council’s proposed changes were unwelcome attempts to impose conformity on Equity members.⁵⁹

Victorious in defeating the proposed changes at the September meeting, Randolph, Polan, and those who shared their views were stunned when the Council decided to overrule the membership’s wishes. Chief among those who voiced their discontent were Ossie Davis, who argued that supporters of the new requirement had “maneuvered our Union into a position which can only be defended by each man carrying his own little hatchet, spying into the politics of his neighbor, and splitting the organization, which in this case is much wiser than its leaders, right down the middle,” and his wife Ruby Dee, who concluded that the Council’s decision was intended “to satisfy the political bigots of the time.” Later in life, Davis spoke openly about his experiences with the Communist Party, which, although he never formally joined, appealed to him on an anti-racist, anti-imperialist basis. Council member Frederick O’Neal, who in 1964 would become the first African-American president of Equity, attempted to mollify Davis and Dee, both already well-established stage and screen actors, with a promise to reconsider the resolution at the December membership meeting, but by the time of the actual meeting the Council had decided against taking a second membership vote.⁶⁰

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ossie Davis to Frederick O’Neal, October 16, 1953, folder 25.1, Actors’ Equity Records; Ruby Dee to Frederick O’Neal, October 16, 1953, folder 25.1, Actors’ Equity Records; Frederick O’Neal to Ossie Davis

In 1954-1955, Equity dealt with a renegade group of members who went by the name of “Aware, Inc.” In a charge that must have been familiar to Equity members by this time, members of Aware asserted that communists were trying to take over the entertainment industry in order to spread propaganda. Aware was opposed to communism for many reasons, most interestingly based on the perception that, in its Stalinist form, it took away individual initiative and freedom of thought. They argued that it “[robbed] man of his individuality” and “[made] him a numbered creature for ‘the state.’” The end goal of communism, they believed, was “deadening bureaucracy, monolithic uniformity,” and “sterile conformity.”⁶¹

This was, indeed, the view of communism held by many Equity members, yet Aware was roundly condemned. What mainstream Equity members were opposed to was not Aware’s ideology, but rather its self-appointed task of rooting out the communist influence they believed had taken over the organization. Equity thus met Aware as a unified front. The group first came to the attention of the Blacklisting Committee in 1953, at which time it was condemned. The following year, the committee designed two resolutions aimed at banning Equity members from belonging to Aware, although the subsequent membership resolution merely took the former step.⁶²

Other developments suggested that the anti-communist and anti-censorship forces within Equity had returned to a sort of equilibrium. Whereas in the 1953 stand-off the Council had urged members to vote for changes to the Equity Constitution that would bar

and Ruby Dee, 1953, folder 25.1, Actors’ Equity Records; Report of Executive Secretary, Angus Duncan, to Quarterly Meeting, December 11, 1953, folder 25.15, Actors’ Equity Records.

⁶¹ Aware, Inc., pamphlet, 1954, folder 29.18, Actors’ Equity Records.

⁶² Anti-Blacklisting Committee Resolutions, 1954, folder 26.27, Actors’ Equity Records; Angus Duncan, Executive Secretary, Actors’ Equity, to Paul R. Milton, Aware, Inc., May 17, 1955, folder 29.18, Actors’ Equity Records.

communists from membership, by 1955 suggestions of this kind were restricted to a minority report of the Blacklisting Committee, where they were quickly condemned by a constitutional review committee. That same year, the Blacklisting Committee recommended to the Council a resolution affirming that political beliefs play no role in determining employment and insisting that “the private life of the individual is his own,” although the Council was not yet ready to take this step.⁶³

One more stand-off remained on the horizon. In the summer of 1955, an announcement came that HUAC, at the encouragement of Aware, was launching a new investigation into the entertainment industry in New York City. As in previous disputes, Equity members were quick to voice their concerns. An independent Committee to End the Blacklist (unrelated to Florida Friebus’s Anti-Blacklist Committee) encouraged Equity members to write newspapers and members of Congress and to appear as protestors and witnesses at the courthouse where the hearings were taking place.⁶⁴ As John Randolph argued, the theatre had a history of promoting freedom and opposing censorship, and it was because of this history that the hearings must be condemned. In a letter that was read at the August 2, 1955, Council meeting, he wrote that “the theater has been an island of liberty in these past few years...It is up to Actors [*sic*] Equity to take the initiative so that the theater can maintain and extend its proud record of upholding American concepts of liberty and freedom.”⁶⁵ Members and their allies in such groups as the ACLU also demanded an official Equity statement condemning the hearings, urged

⁶³ Alfred Harding, Constitutional Review Committee, Minority Report Comment, 1955, folder 29.17, Actors’ Equity Records; Anti-Blacklisting Committee Minutes, August 12, 1955, folder 29.17, Actors’ Equity Records.

⁶⁴ Committee to End the Blacklist, “Dear Fellow Artists,” August 5, 1955, folder 29.17, Actors’ Equity Records.

⁶⁵ John Randolph to the Council, July/August 1955, folder 29.19, Actors’ Equity Records.

the Council to protect witnesses by keeping their names from the press, and requested that a committee be sent to observe the hearings.⁶⁶ The official Equity response, however, included only the last measure, as the organization's leadership felt that adequate steps had already been taken to protect members called to testify.⁶⁷

Of the twenty-seven performers called to testify in front of HUAC when the hearings began in August, at least sixteen refused to answer questions, and only one, George Hall, affirmed past participation in the Communist Party, naming eight other alleged members, all of whom were already on the committee's list of witnesses. Among those he named were Peter Lawrence, who in 1949 had argued passionately that Equity not give in to red-baiting; John Randolph, who had condemned the Council's 1953 non-totalitarian membership requirement and urged opposition to the new hearings; and Randolph's wife, Sarah Cunningham. While none of those called was eager to testify, some were willing to answer questions. A past target of anti-communist factions within Equity, Sam Jaffe, for example, agreed to answer all questions, though he was confident that his record revealed him to be "a good American citizen."⁶⁸

Others, however, refused to do so, citing the first, fourth, and fifth amendments or the strength of their own convictions. Interestingly, the decision not to testify functioned as a microcosm of the debates about secrecy, conformity, and patriotism that had been

⁶⁶ See, for instance, Therese Hayden to Angus Duncan, August 10, 1955, folder 29.19, Actors' Equity Records; George E. Rundquist, Executive Director, ACLU, to Florida Friebus, August 11, 1955, folder 29.19, Actors' Equity Records; Fred Rosenberg to the Actors' Equity Association, August 18, 1955, folder 29.19, Actors' Equity Records.

⁶⁷ Angus Duncan, Executive Secretary, to John Randolph, August 5, 1955, folder 29.19, Actors' Equity Records; Ralph Bellamy, Statement from President Bellamy, September 1955, folder 29.19, Actors' Equity Records.

⁶⁸ C.P. Trussell, "27 Entertainers Face Red Inquiry," *New York Times*, August 11, 1955; Brooks Atkinson, "Theatre Loyalty," *New York Times*, September 4, 1955; Milton Bracker, "Actor, Once a Red, Accuses 8 Others; 5 Assail Inquiry," *New York Times*, August 18, 1955.

swirling through Equity for the past ten years. To Frances E. Walter, the Pennsylvania Democrat who chaired the committee, refusal to answer questions was tantamount to an admission of guilt. “I am sure that these people,” he insisted, “have demonstrated that there is something to be concealed in the framework of the unions, something that was designed to make them as captive as the United Electrical Workers and the Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers were.”⁶⁹ In Walter’s view, refusing to confess one’s beliefs was proof that those beliefs were un-American. This belief extended from HUAC to “regular” Americans like Bruce F. Williams, who argued that those who refused to answer questions and thus “to remove the cloud of suspicion from...[their] name[s]” were “unworthy of the trust and respect of honest Americans.”⁷⁰ John Randolph, meanwhile, based his refusal to answer questions on the fact that the committee “create[d] a an atmosphere of fear, conformity, and blacklist in the theatre.”⁷¹ Largely anti-climactic on their own, the hearings nonetheless add more evidence to the argument that, in the climate of the Cold War, self-expression functioned as both a right and at times a requirement of Americanism. As Equity member John B. Reddington put it in a telegram to the Council, “If members of Equity are not or have not been communists why are they afraid to say so? You should denounce the so called actors and actresses who are flaunting their leftist colors before the Walter committee.”⁷²

⁶⁹ Milton Bracker, “7 in Theatre Balk at All Questions on Communist Ties,” *New York Times*, August 16, 1955.

⁷⁰ Bruce F. Williams to Management, St. James Theatre, August 2, 1955, folder 29.19, Actors’ Equity Records. Williams sent identical letters to the St. James, where Stanley Prager was performing, and the Music Box Theater, which employed Lou Polan. Both Prager and Polan had been called to testify and had pled the fifth.

⁷¹ Bracker.

⁷² John B. Reddington to the Council, August 16, 1955, folder 29.19, Actors’ Equity Records.

The conflicts within Equity, however, never reached the heights of those experienced by its sister union, the American Federation of Television and Radio Actors (AFTRA). AFTRA, like Equity, had voted to condemn *Aware*.⁷³ Unlike Equity, AFTRA would not tolerate the decision to plead the fifth amendment in front of HUAC, and the National Board ruled unanimously that anyone who did so would be “guilty of conduct prejudicial to the welfare of AFTRA” and could be fined, censured, suspended, or expelled.⁷⁴ By contrast, Equity refused to condemn those who had pled the fifth, despite President Ralph Bellamy’s annoyance. Bellamy was personally convinced that the hearings were justified and constitutional, that adequate protections were in place to provide redress for any loss of employment that resulted from the hearings, and that those who pled the fifth did so only to “debase” the proceedings.⁷⁵

Yet, despite urgings from more conservative members, the organization refused to punish those who chose not to testify. An appearance before the committee was not a conviction, and thus it did not disqualify members based on Equity’s non-totalitarian rule. As Assistant Executive Secretary Paul G. Jones put it in Bellamy’s absence, “There is no action contemplated on those of our members who appeared before the House of Un-American Activities Committee [*sic*].”⁷⁶ The union’s 1953 anti-blacklisting resolution, attenuated though it may have been by the Council’s relative conservatism, seems to have

⁷³ “Radio and TV Artists Vote, 982 to 514, To Condemn *Aware*, Anti-Red Group,” *New York Times*, July 4, 1955.

⁷⁴ Alex McKee, Acting National Secretary, AFTRA, Statement, August 10, 1955, folder 30.19, Actors’ Equity Records.

⁷⁵ Ralph Bellamy, Statement from President Bellamy, September, 1955, folder 29.19, Actors’ Equity Papers.

⁷⁶ Paul G. Jones, Assistant Executive Secretary, to Ruth Hunter, September 1, 1955, folder 29.19, Actors’ Equity Records. Hunter had written a letter to Ralph Bellamy, angrily inquiring what would be done to punish those who refused to testify. Ruth Hunter to Ralph Bellamy, undated [August 1955], folder 29.19, Actors’ Equity Records.

prevented punitive action and thus staved off anything resembling the more wrenching dispute experienced in AFTRA.⁷⁷

Despite the inconclusive nature of, and Equity's middle-of-the-road response to, the new investigations, by 1955 too much damage had been done for the corrosive legacy of blacklisting not to live on. Mere weeks after the hearings, Philip Loeb, whose sole work since he was blacklisted in 1952 was a revival of Anton Chekov's *The Three Sisters* early in 1955, committed suicide.⁷⁸ As prominent actress Margaret Webster wrote to the *New York Times*, "Loeb died of a sickness commonly called 'the blacklist.'"⁷⁹

After 1955, blacklisting faded in importance from Equity proceedings, but the discourse of authenticity its members helped to develop only grew in prominence in the broader culture. To the anti-communist and anti-censorship forces both within and outside the Actors' Equity Association, unfettered self-expression functioned as an antidote to the suspicious secrecy of the Communist Party and the repressive conformity of censorship, respectively. Good artists did not keep their thoughts and beliefs hidden, and neither did good Americans. The political exigencies of the Cold War attached new importance to self-revelation, a trope that, as the next section will make clear, brought with it seriously gendered ramifications. In my discussion of Lee Strasberg's Method acting, I will argue that the same climate that led Actors' Equity to emphasize self-expression as the key tenet of Americanism also fostered a confessional aesthetic, in which revealing one's inner self became a crucial weapon in the battle against totalitarianism.

⁷⁷ This was the conclusion reached by Cogley, et al.

⁷⁸ "Philip Loeb Dead; Prominent Actor," *New York Times*, September 2, 1955.

⁷⁹ Margaret Webster to the Drama Editor, *New York Times*, October 16, 1955.

Gender and Method Acting

Secret-keeping was reviled not only in postwar politics, but also in the aesthetic realm, where scholar Deborah Nelson has identified a “confessional culture” deeply bound up with the Cold War. “The expanding limits of self-disclosure,” she argues, “were...intimately associated with assertions of individuality against a homogenizing social environment, acts that were considered antitotalitarian protests in themselves.”⁸⁰ Lee Strasberg’s Actors Studio, which taught students to connect with and express their true selves, freed from the mechanical habits learned through decades of socialization, was another example of this confessional culture. There, students learned that the expression of their own experiences, emotions, and personal truths were the keys to good acting. Along with this emphasis on the primacy of personal truth, however, came embarrassing and often painful demands both to reveal oneself in uncomfortable ways and, because Method acting depended on identification with one’s character, to relive painful experiences from one’s own life. Thus, while Method acting should, because it eschewed overarching theories and analyses in favor of personal truth, emotion, and experience, be seen as a step in the path toward identity politics, it also promulgated very conservative gender politics, as the characters available for actresses to identify with often not only lacked agency, but also had undergone extensive, debilitating traumas. In order to achieve authenticity, actresses needed analogous experiences in their own

⁸⁰ Deborah Nelson, *Pursuing Privacy in Cold War America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 19.

personal histories, and they needed to be willing to re-live them. Method acting thus depended on women's subjugation in their real lives.⁸¹

Born in 1901 in what is now the Ukraine, Lee Strasberg grew up in the polyglot world of New York's Lower East Side. Exposed early in life to the Yiddish theatre, his passion was further stoked by involvement with the club, Students of Art and Drama, which was organized by the Chrystie Street Settlement House. Perhaps the most seminal experience in his life came in 1923-24, when the Moscow Art Theatre (MAT), founded in 1897 by the actor and director Konstantin Stanislavsky and others, came to New York.

Strasberg was stunned by how "true, real, and emotionally full" MAT's performances were, especially in comparison to the broad gestures and grand speech of American theatre.⁸² Stanislavsky developed the "system" (the Russian's term) to produce such performances, Strasberg later learned, in response to his own problems as an actor. In 1906, while reminiscing about a performance he had given in Henrik Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* (which, coincidentally, deals with a man's attempt to preserve his own individual truth in the face of overwhelming, opposing social forces), Stanislavsky realized that his initially inspired performance had become repetitive. The part that at first came easily to him became, as the play's run wore on, a mechanical, imitative copy of his earlier performances. As Strasberg wrote decades later, Stanislavsky began to focus on

only the externals of his characterization. He had mechanically repeated these fixed appurtenances of the role and the physical signs of an emotion that had been absent. In some scenes, he had tried to act nervous and somewhat exalted, and for this purpose he had made quick, nervous movements. In other he had tried to

⁸¹ This same analysis could be applied to African-American performers, who most commonly would have been forced to identify with characters in positions of servitude.

⁸² Strasberg, 37.

look naïve and to do so had mechanically imitated childlike and innocent eyes. He had copied naivete, but he was not naïve. He moved his feet quickly, but did not experience any inner hurry that might have caused short, quick steps.⁸³

Simultaneously, as Strasberg recounted the tale, Stanislavsky realized that his performance had been based on memories of a good friend. He began to search for a way for each performance to be based on these “living memories,” preventing imitative and mechanical repetitions. His resulting system depended on recreating sensory experiences in order to produce authentic emotion.⁸⁴

When the MAT returned to Moscow in 1924, two of its members, Richard Boleslavsky and Maria Ouspenskaya, stayed behind and formed the American Laboratory Theatre to teach Stanislavsky’s system in the U.S. After successfully auditioning for Boleslavsky and Ouspenskaya, Strasberg received extensive training in the techniques that would later form the basis of his own Method, including sense memory exercises with objects, situations, animals, and characters. As its name implies, sense memory was based on “the memory of physical sensation”; exercises involved recreating actual sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile experiences, eventually in the service of producing authentic emotions.⁸⁵ Starting in 1931, these techniques also influenced the Group Theatre, the left-leaning, Popular Front-era company of which Strasberg was a founding member.

Coupled with its stunning popularity in the conservative, virulently anti-communist postwar era, the Russian and progressive American provenance of Method acting at first appears curious. Group Theatre members were disinclined to hide the fact

⁸³ Ibid., 48.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 50-62.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 63-75.

that political ideologies influenced their theatrical aspirations, and the organization included several Communist Party members and many more sympathetic allies (most famously Elia Kazan, the future director of *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *On the Waterfront* and later HUAC friendly witness). Their first production was of Communist Party member John Howard Lawson's *Success Story*. Yet, if the Group's politics were irreconcilably out of step with postwar priorities, its aesthetics were not. Despite Boleslavsky's, Ouspenskaya's, and the Group's formal commitment to artistic collectivism—in the American company, all members were paid the same regardless of the roles they were assigned, and each person's contributions were, at least ostensibly, considered equally important—there never existed any doubt that good acting could only emanate from personal truth, experience, and emotion. When collectivist politics seemed at odds with individualist aesthetics, the latter won out. Although Strasberg himself eschewed politics, especially in comparison to other members of the Group, he did tantalizingly note later in life that he had rejected “System,” the term Stanislavsky had used to describe his theories, in favor of “Method” “because I never liked the implication of the term *system*.”⁸⁶ Russian though the origins of Method acting may have been, its American architect was quick to distance himself from what many in the U.S. perceived as the mechanical and dehumanizing nature of Soviet communism. To American ears, “system” conjured images of machine-made automatons, not authentic humans.

Strasberg spent the 1920s at the Theatre Guild of New York and the 1930s with the Group Theatre, a hotbed of Popular Front radicalism. Largely apolitical himself, the director nonetheless witnessed vibrant discussions about communism and heated debates

⁸⁶ Ibid., 84.

about the Party itself.⁸⁷ At the Actors Studio, where Strasberg became artistic director three years after its 1948 founding, the director continued the work of Stanislavsky and his cohorts to develop a form of acting that came as close as possible to “the process of living on the stage.”⁸⁸ In Strasberg’s own view, his main contribution *vis-à-vis* those made by Stanislavsky and others was a focus not just on the production of emotion, but also its expression. “I came to realize more and more,” he wrote, “that an actor could experience and yet not be able to express an emotion...I was now fully aware of this as a central problem in acting,” as well as in life. In this view, emotions that remained inside were useless; their importance came through their externalization. In the 1950s, Strasberg turned his attention to uncovering the causes this stymied emotional expression and developing techniques to unblock it.⁸⁹

The causes, he soon learned, were “not hard to discover”: people had trouble expressing emotion as a result of decades of social training. “Whatever capacities the human being is born with,” Strasberg noted, “it is by means of training and conditioning that he learns to use them...He develops habits of thought, of speech, of behavior, of attitudes toward his environment...He also develops habits of expression. He is conditioned to express his feelings and emotions not by nature, character, and strength of his own emotional responses, but by what society or his environment will permit.” This training, in turn, led people to develop “mannerisms” done out of habit and disconnected from the individual’s true thoughts and feelings. Further problems resulted from the fact

⁸⁷ On the Group Theatre and the 1930s, see Wendy Smith, *Real-Life Drama: The Group Theatre and America, 1931-1940* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990).

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 94-95.

that “since to the individual these [mannerisms] are his natural expressions, he thinks of them as being real and true and does not perceive that they are mannered.” Accordingly, Strasberg conceived of his main mission as “find[ing] ways of dealing with an actor’s mannerisms that obscured the truth of expression that involves the relationship between intensity of feeling and emotion.”⁹⁰

Despite his use of the gender-specific “he,” Strasberg did not seem to be particularly concerned with the problems men faced expressing their authentic selves and emotions. Quite the contrary. He found men *better* equipped than women to break free from conventional, learned behaviors. Almost all of the examples Strasberg gave of “mannered” behavior, for example, involved women, all of whom required (as he related each story) his help—better understood as bullying and intimidation—to distinguish between what was a mannerism and what was a true, authentic emotion or behavior.

In order to prevent one actress, who had a tendency to flutter her hands, from engaging in this mannerism and thus preventing more authentic forms of expression, Strasberg tied her hands behind a pillar. The director engaged in a protracted power struggle with another woman, “a highly gifted young actress [who] refused to recognize the difference between her mannerisms and her reality. It took her over ten years before she was able to accept the idea. Once she was able to acknowledge this, her acting showed remarkable progress.” Often, Strasberg’s queries into women’s real lives revealed the reasons for their mannered or tense behavior. In response to his prodding, one actress revealed that she had developed tension in her neck as a child, when the older sister with whom she shared a bed threatened to kill her if she did not stop moving in her sleep. Another woman did not realize until Strasberg pointed it out that her tension was a

⁹⁰ Ibid., 95.

result of her having been frequently punished as a child; yet another actress felt compelled to reveal that her tension derived from her father's insistence that all actresses were "tramps." When the actress described feeling confused by the competing demands of her father's approval and her chosen profession, Strasberg rejected his student's analysis of her own reality. "You weren't confused," he told her, "you were conditioned to a certain behavior."

By contrast, the only time Strasberg discussed a male actor's problems with expression was to describe a situation in which the student was able to recognize, analyze, and overcome the problem on his own. By implication, while men were able to distinguish between mannerisms and learned behaviors on the one hand and true, authentic emotions and behaviors on the other, women were not. Moreover, there was no room in his theories for the possibility that behaviors and emotions could be *both* learned *and* experienced as authentic by the individual. When an aesthetic philosophy predicated on individual truth bumped up against a broader set of social and cultural mores granting men the authority to define women's reality, the latter won out. As later chapters will show, the relationship between authenticity and gender politics played out similarly in the New Left group Students for a Democratic Society.⁹¹

Eliminating mannerisms and learned behaviors was only the first step in the training received at the Actors Studio, where students learned techniques aimed at unblocking and expressing their authentic emotions. Many of these techniques derived in straightforward manner from Stanislavsky, Boleslavsky, and Ouspenskaya. Drawing on the work of French psychologist Theodule Ribot, who in 1898's *The Psychology of the Emotions* had wondered whether or not "emotions formerly experienced can be revived

⁹¹ Ibid., 96-101.

in the consciousness spontaneously or at will, independently of any actual occurrence which might provoke them,” Stanislavsky had determined that the way to recreate emotion was to recreate the sensory experiences that had stimulated them.⁹² At the Actors Studio, students would attempt to recreate the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile experiences associated with both everyday events and powerful experiences.⁹³ These exercises were predicated on a belief that, with the elimination of mannered, conventional, mechanical behaviors, recreating sensory experiences could not help but recreate authentic emotions.

Accordingly, the next stage in the training sequence once again took aim at convention. Once students had mastered recreating these individual sensory experiences, they were asked to combine them with some form of vocalization, first with a long, sustained “ah” sound or a short, explosive “ha!,” next with the recitation of a song or monologue. However, students were to avoid attaching any preconceived meaning to these words, letting them serve only as conduits for whatever emotions bubbled to the surface in the course of the exercise. “The purpose,” Strasberg wrote, “is not to permit the song to be performed in the habitual rhythm and tonality, but to permit it to be colored by the reality the actor is creating. The actor’s tendency is to sing the song the way it is supposed to be done, even if he is not consciously aware of doing so. What we try to achieve at this point is the opposite”—the elimination of “conventional delivery.”⁹⁴

⁹² Ibid., 111.

⁹³ Ibid., 131-40.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 141-2.

What Strasberg's own key contributions had in common was an emphasis on self-revelation. As noted above, he was aware that emotions could exist deep within the individual, yet remain blocked from expression. In the mid-1950s he developed two exercises, the private moment and song and dance, to mitigate this condition and free the performer. "Having realized that the actor's behavior on the stage is often limited by the habits of expression which he has developed in life," he wrote, "I searched for other possibilities that would help to strengthen the actor's expressiveness."⁹⁵ The first of these exercises, the private moment, derived from Stanislavsky's charge that the performer needed to learn to be "private in public."⁹⁶ In private, Strasberg noted, people would behave in ways that they would not in front of others, singing, dancing, talking to themselves, and so forth. If this sense of privacy could be recreated on the stage, he hoped, performers would be both less conscious of the audience and, relatedly, less inhibited, less reluctant to let true, authentic behavior and emotions come out (women, he noted, were particularly likely to experience these inhibitions in public).⁹⁷ In preparing for the private moment, the student would select a behavior s/he would not engage in with others around, then begin by recreating through sense memory the place where this behavior took place. The recreation of place, Strasberg believed, would elicit the motivation for the behavior. However, it was important that, "when the actor practices the private moment, he does not try to repeat or imitate it. Once he aims at a preconceived result through repetition or imitation, his awareness of an audience only intensifies. Part of the function of the private moment is to permit the actor to lessen his

⁹⁵ Ibid., 143.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 144.

concern with the audience and to give himself fully and unself-consciously to the experience that he is creating.”⁹⁸ The distinction Strasberg made between mannered and authentic thus coincided with his distinction between public and private, for his theories did not admit the possibility that private behavior could continue to be influenced by social training.

A second exercise developed around the same time, song and dance, aimed to help singers and dancers escape the “definite rhythmic and physical pattern that might confine them as actors.”⁹⁹ The exercise began with the student standing on stage and looking at the audience. Next, the performer was asked to begin singing a simple song, such as “Happy Birthday.” However, s/he was to put the same emphasis on each long, drawn-out syllable, avoiding as much as possible the usual rhythm. Rather than remaining “subservient to the pull of habit,” s/he was to put any feelings that bubbled up into the song. This first part of the exercise often elicited strong reactions, including laughter and crying, from the student, responses Strasberg attributed to excessive concern with the audience. The “dance” part of the exercise, in which the student would repeat a simple physical movement until Strasberg told her/him to change, then began. Each new movement should be spontaneous; the performer should not know in advance what movement s/he would do next. Rather, actions should emanate from feelings. Finally, the “song” would be re-introduced, with short, explosive sounds accompanying each movement’s repetition. Strasberg eventually discovered that this exercise was useful for all students, especially those who did not show much emotion (again, the example he

⁹⁸ Ibid., 145.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 152.

used to illustrate this fact was a woman).¹⁰⁰ He found in it the “means by which I could unlock human experience from the habits and patterns of nonexpression in order to satisfy the demands of stage art.”¹⁰¹ Students who successfully completed the song and dance exercise, he noted, would almost immediately become “more responsive and more expressive” in other areas of the work as well.¹⁰² Because it forced students not to rely on conventional speech patterns and physical behaviors, song and dance forced “whatever is happening” emotionally to “come through...when...sensations and impulses are stirred in the exercise, the actor must contact them. He must be permitted to express himself through the deliberate demands of the exercise, not by involuntary nervous movements, gestures, and reactions, which are a form of stifling the expression of what is occurring.”¹⁰³

Strasberg’s most controversial technique was (and, indeed, continues to be) emotional memory, which was developed for moments demanding intense emotion. Performers were to choose “the strongest thing that ever happened to him, whether it aroused anger, fear, or excitement,” and, by recreating the sensory elements of this experience, re-live and express the emotion that resulted from it.¹⁰⁴ On the face of it emotional memory was gender-blind, as both men and women would have had both traumatic and joyful moments in their pasts. Moreover, as Strasberg was quick to point

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 157.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid., 158.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 159.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 149.

out, he was not interested in knowing his students' actual experiences.¹⁰⁵ Yet, when one considers the roles available to women at the time, emotional memory becomes a different animal altogether, as an actress had to identify with characters who lacked agency, re-experiencing similar moments from her own life, and/or, in the case of the best, fullest, most rewarding roles available to women—such as the iconic female roles in the plays of Tennessee Williams, the playwright most closely associated with Method acting—with characters who experienced multiple, crushing traumas, including rape. According to the dictates of Strasberg's Method, that is, an actress hoping to “successfully” play Blanche DuBois in *A Streetcar Named Desire* would need a moment in her own past that made her feel as Blanche felt upon being raped by her brother-in-law—and would need to re-live this moment.

Method acting's emphasis on authenticity was thus gendered in several ways. On the one hand, Strasberg's insistence that “the actor's truth is first and last the truth of experience, of behavior, and of expression”¹⁰⁶ was not always born out in practice; as discussed above, what an actress considered her own personal truth could easily be rejected by Strasberg as a mere mannerism or convention that resulted from social training. On top of this distinction between mannerisms and conventions and authentic behaviors and emotions, Strasberg laid an equally irreconcilable distinction between public and private, not realizing that, even in their private lives, people's behaviors and feelings continued to be influenced by the broader society. Rather than seeing the constructedness of all behavior, he perceived women's greater difficulty in acting “private in public”—acting authentically, in other words. He perceived a similar

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 173.

discrepancy in women's greater difficulty giving up (what was seen as) learned, inexpressive behavior in favor of authentic, expressive behavior in the song and dance exercise. On the other hand, women who *did* successfully abandon their mannerisms and attain authenticity did so at great personal expense, for doing so often demanded reliving traumatic, helpless moments from her own life. Indeed, Method acting seems to have functioned quite differently for men and for women, perhaps accounting for the greater memorability of male Method actors. In the context of the iconic plays and films associated with Method acting, especially those of Tennessee Williams, men were free, expressive, and unblocked, while women were conflicted, even driven mad over the truth that they could not express.

Yet, Strasberg's theories should also be connected to other important postwar intellectual currents. His emphasis on individual emotion and experience, even if not always implemented, was part of a broader cultural trend that made the self the only measure of truth. This emphasis on the self resulted from the perceived moral bankruptcy and dehumanization inherent in all systematic and ideological explanations for the world, especially communism. The ability (or demand, in some cases) of Americans to express what was inside of them also provided a way of protecting the United States against fascism and totalitarianism. In these startling connections, however, Method acting also helps to reveal how the Cold War contributed to the development of identity politics, in which convictions were based on the truth of one's own experiences and emotions.

In both their aesthetics and their politics, theatre artists in postwar America insisted on authenticity—the ability of the self to break free from repressive social forces

and express its most deeply-held thoughts, feelings, and beliefs—as the best way to reassert their own patriotism and stave off fascism and totalitarianism. In the first part of this chapter, I revealed that the equation the Actors' Equity Association drew between being “a fine artist” and being “a good American” not only depended fundamentally on self-expression, but also was a direct result of the attacks the organization experienced as a result of the Cold War and McCarthyism. These events paralleled developments occurring in the aesthetic realm, where Lee Strasberg developed theories that insisted on the importance of authenticity and that had complex ramifications for gender. As both Actors' Equity and Method acting had roots in the American left, tracing their development adds new layers to our understanding of how the gender and cultural politics of the left were remade during the Cold War.

Chapter two, which discusses the work of playwright Tennessee Williams, picks up on several of these themes. Closely associated with Method acting, Williams's plays were certainly among those that demanded actresses identify with characters who underwent serious traumas and re-live similar experiences from their own lives in the service of authenticity. Yet, to the playwright, expressing the authentic self was precisely what was needed to combat the fascist and totalitarian tendencies he saw around the world, including the United States, and he developed a theory of spectatorship that promised to stave off such authoritarianism. Moreover, as a gay man living in a repressive time, Williams was particularly concerned with using theatre to stamp out the virulent homophobia he saw all around him. In this way, I argue, Williams anticipated the gay liberation movement of the late 1960s and 1970s.

Chapter Two: “Deified Empathy”: Tennessee Williams’s Aesthetic Activism

“...Sebastian was a poet! That’s what I meant when I said his life was his work because the work of a poet is the life of a poet and—vice versa, the life of a poet is the work of a poet, I mean you can’t separate them, I mean—well, for instance, a salesman’s work is one thing and his life is another—or can be. The same thing’s true of—doctor, lawyer, merchant, thief!—But a poet’s life is his work and his work is his life in a special sense because—oh, I’ve already talked myself breathless and dizzy.” –Tennessee Williams, *Suddenly Last Summer*, 1958¹

In a letter written during the last year of his life, the American playwright Tennessee Williams insisted that he was not, and had never been, political. “In all my life,” he wrote, “I have never signed a paper except a professional contract. Belonged to no political party. In fact I have only registered to vote once in my life, when I first came of age.” He suspected that an actress with whom he was working “was...somewhat put off by my lack of interest in certain political matters—in fact, my profound ignorance of them.” He was “not interested in her party nor any party now existing,” had “never read a word of Marx, Lenin, or Trotzky [*sic*],” and claimed “to have more interest in the tragic story of the Czar and his family, despite my knowledge of the plight of the serfs under his helpless and somewhat supine rule.”²

Yet, Tennessee Williams *was* political—deeply, passionately, at times contradictorily, but always political. Throughout his life he wrote with fervor against war, fascism, totalitarianism, inequality, and bigotry of all kinds. Even in the 1982 letter

¹ Tennessee Williams, *Suddenly Last Summer*, in Williams, *Four Plays* (New York: Signet Classic, 1976 [1958]), 12.

² Tennessee Williams to Milton Goldman, May 2, 1982, folder 54.10. Tennessee Williams Papers, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin [hereafter “Tennessee Williams Papers”]. Williams passed away on February 25, 1983, several months after this letter was written.

quoted above, Williams could not keep himself from commenting on the current world situation. He deplored the present state of “the one-time democracy known as the United States of America” and was particularly critical of the “frightening” Reagan administration, which he accused of harboring “an unconscious death-wish for themselves and the world-population in their build-up of diabolical toys from the devil’s workshop such as the ‘nukes.’”³

At the same time, it remains true that Williams did not devote the bulk of his time and energy to easily visible forms of political activism. Despite his life-long interest in “official” political matters—foreign policy, the disparity between rich and poor, and the violation of civil liberties, to name a few with which he was particularly concerned—Williams’s enduring passion was his writing. Writing was not, however, an escape from the world. Rather, it functioned as a form of political activism. Drawing on both archival and published writings, I have discovered that, to Williams himself, authentic self-expression was the key to staving off totalitarianism, which he perceived not only as an abstract possibility but, because of its connection to homophobia, as a very real threat to his own personal safety. However, the anti-fascist aesthetic he developed in response to these fears could not account for the material experiences of actresses cast in his plays. Thus, both his private writings and his work, including the play and film versions of *Suddenly, Last Summer*, which I analyze below, present rich opportunities to explore both the liberating and troubling aspects of authenticity in relation to gender and sexuality. At the same time, Williams’s anti-fascist political-aesthetic theory, which emphasized the self as the measure of truth, also helps us to understand the emergence of identity politics from the conservative milieu of Cold War America.

³ Ibid.

This analysis benefits from existing, exciting scholarly work on Tennessee Williams's relationship to postwar American politics. David Savran, for example, has drawn on Williams's later work to connect the playwright to the deconstruction of subjectivity in the theories of Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault, arguing that "the most radical aspect of the Williams text" is "its surrealistic subversion of the liberal humanist subject, its tendency to dissolve both the imaginary integrity of the subjectivities in its midst and those of its readers and spectators who are (knowingly or inadvertently) hailed into this text of bliss." According to Savran, Williams located political agency in the deconstruction of subjectivity associated with postmodernism.⁴ An analysis of Williams's personal writings, however, reveals that this was not the case. Although it is possible to see precursors of postmodernism in Williams's occasional play with identity, he did not see performativity as threatening to, or incompatible with, an authentic self.

Robert Corber has approached the question of subjectivity in Tennessee Williams's work with a bit more ambivalence, although his conclusions are equally problematic. He argues that there were elements of both deconstruction and reification in Williams's work. Although Williams "[recognized] that achieving subjecthood can be a key moment in the radicalization process" and "understood that mobilizing gay men in opposition to postwar structures of oppression required a strategic stabilization of their identities," he stops short of arguing that Williams himself believed in the naturalness of subjectivity. Instead, Corber asserts that Williams's "investment in Enlightenment

⁴ David Savran, *Communists, Cowboys, and Queers: The Politics of Masculinity in the Work of Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 160-61.

conceptions of identity should be understood as purely strategic.”⁵ My research reveals that this is not the case. Williams’s belief in the authentic self sprang from personal conviction and was certainly not, as Corber suggests, “purely strategic.”

Two recent works have more successfully historicized Williams’s work, largely because they rely on a more useful combination of published and personal writings. Arguing against those scholars and critics who have asserted that Williams’s work reveals deep-seated homophobia and self-loathing, Michael Paller has insisted upon the necessity of historicizing the author’s products. Paller asserts correctly that a play’s meaning must be considered within the context of the time in which it was produced.⁶ James Gilbert has contextualized Williams’s writings within the adolescent search for authenticity so prominent in postwar American culture. Tracing the progression of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* from play draft to theatrical production to film, each version further away from Williams’s original vision, Gilbert argues that the author saw adult masculinity as inherently performative.⁷

Born in Columbus, Mississippi, in 1911 and graduating from the University of Iowa in 1938, Williams first attained prominence with his play *The Glass Menagerie*, which opened on Broadway in 1945. Two years later, the stunning success of *A Streetcar Named Desire* catapulted him to greater fame. Unsurprisingly given the historical context, the playwright’s primary political concern was with the twin specters of fascism and totalitarianism, two terms he used largely interchangeably and saw the potential for

⁵ Robert J. Corber, *Homosexuality in Cold War America: Resistance and the Crisis of Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 114-15.

⁶ Michael Paller, *Gentlemen Callers: Tennessee Williams, Homosexuality, and Mid-Twentieth Century Drama* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 3.

⁷ James Gilbert, *Men in the Middle: Searching for Masculinity in the 1950s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 187-88.

everywhere. In examining his writings on capitalism and communism between the early 1940s and the mid-1950s, it is clear that to a certain extent Williams, like many of his contemporaries, went from seeing communism as the potential savior from to the very representative of totalitarianism. Yet, the bifurcated nature of the Cold War world was not truly the defining feature of Williams's anti-totalitarianism. Rather, totalitarianism, which Williams defined as a force that denied the validity of individual emotions and experiences and/or their expression in art, was to be combated wherever it was found—either in the Soviet Union *or* the United States. Totalitarianism also had another more personal, deeply troubling aspect in the playwright's eyes; he associated it not only with the abrogation of each citizen's freedom of expression, but also and more specifically with the targeting, be it through marginalization, criminalization, violence, or even death, of those considered deviant or other, including himself. To Williams, totalitarianism and homophobia were thus linked. In insisting on authenticity—the importance of one's self, its experiences, and the expression thereof—Williams developed an aesthetic philosophy that not only engaged with the pre-eminent geopolitical struggle of the day (while at the same time resisting the state-sanctioned homophobia it engendered), but also anticipated the emergence of identity politics. In this section, I will chart both the explicit development of Williams's anti-totalitarian thought and how it connected to his views on art and selfhood.

In many respects, Tennessee Williams's relationship to the Cold War was typical of his generational and ideological cohort. In the 1930s and 1940s Williams, like many others, had considered the possibility that communism might be a positive alternative to the inequities of capitalism. By the early 1950s he no longer saw this as a tenable

position. By no means was Tennessee Williams the only, or even the most committed, leftist to disavow Marxism in the wake of World War Two. Yet, his place on this shifting political terrain must have been tenuous. While sympathy toward communism, the labor movement, or even the civil rights movement was enough to subject progressive Americans to persecution, as both an artist and a man coming to terms with his own homosexuality, Tennessee Williams's relationship to the Cold War was even more complex. He was surely aware of the intensified homophobia generated by McCarthyism, a connection on which many scholars have elaborated.

As historian Elaine Tyler May has argued, postwar Americans developed a domestic analogue to George Kennan's foreign policy of containment. While the latter sought to keep communists within a well-defined, and thus less threatening, sphere of influence, the former sought to contain potentially disruptive and subversive individuals within heteronormative family units. In his 1942 book *Generation of Vipers*, author Philip Wylie blamed "Momism" for America's inability to stand up to communists, arguing that overbearing mothers would raise weak, effeminate, homosexual sons who would be susceptible to communist influence. This reflected a belief that "sex perverts" were weak, easily seduced, and thus a threat to national security. In her exploration of the medical discourses deployed in support of this view, Carolyn Herbst Lewis has similarly argued that the heterosexual family unit "became, symbolically and literally, a fortress against the anxieties provoked by the Cold War."⁸

These beliefs quickly manifested themselves in federal policy. In February of 1950, a State Department official testified in Congress that several dozen employees had

⁸ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988); Carolyn Herbst Lewis, *Prescription for Heterosexuality: Sexual Citizenship in the Cold War Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 4.

been dismissed because of homosexual activity. Republican leaders jumped on this accusation, claiming that homosexuals had infiltrated the executive branch of the government and that President Harry Truman had failed to deal with it adequately. In response, the Senate authorized a formal inquiry into the employment of “homosexuals and other moral perverts” in the federal government. Just weeks after his inauguration in 1953, President Dwight D. Eisenhower issued Executive Order 10450, which barred “sex perverts” (gay men and lesbians) from all federal jobs. Many states quickly followed suit, and the FBI initiated a widespread system of surveillance to keep these men and women off the federal payrolls. The armed forces, too, stepped up their dismissal of gays and lesbians.⁹

In light of these developments, it is all the more striking that Tennessee Williams would at times seem to embrace the strategies and goals of the Cold War. While it is probable that he adopted these strategies as conscious self-preservation tactics, the presence of this discourse in his private letters to close friends suggests the possibility that, in the process Claude Levi-Strauss has termed *bricolage*, Williams found something useful in this rhetoric.¹⁰ Indeed, the language of the Cold War provided Williams with a way to protest its repressive status quo. Williams drew on discourses of national security not in tacit complicity with Cold War-induced homophobia but rather as a way of using the discourses that *denied* him subjectivity to *assert* the same. That is, Williams used the Cold War’s emphasis on authentic selfhood to insist on the legitimacy of a gay self.

⁹ See John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988); David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). Margot Canaday has also written about how various aspects of federal policy both implicitly and explicitly encouraged normative heterosexuality. Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

¹⁰ Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968 [1966]).

Insisting on the fundamental nature of his own subjectivity was thus a way of challenging the state-sanctioned homophobia generated by anti-communist hysteria. As anti-communism linked subversive political ideologies to “deviant” sexuality, it also placed a great deal of emphasis on the primacy of the self, its experiences and emotions, and the expression thereof, priorities developed in the hopes of painting a stark contrast between the freedom of the United States and the repressive conformity of the Soviet Union. Ironically, Williams found in this discourse a useful way of combating his own marginalization, although he certainly did not use it the way ardent Cold Warriors would have liked, as he painted both nations as breeding grounds for totalitarianism.

In the 1930s and 1940s, Tennessee Williams was far from defending America as a benevolent force in the world, a position he would later (albeit selectively) come to embrace. His most extensive treatise on the subject of capitalism and communism, a letter written to his friend Joseph Hazan either during or just prior to America’s involvement in World War Two, could in many ways have served as a blueprint for the segment of the Old Left that hewed most closely to the Communist Party line, not least in its condemnation of fascism, a term Williams did not hesitate to use to describe the United States. He saw American capitalism as inherently imperialistic and believed that communist revolution would solve a variety of ills not necessarily economic in nature. On the other hand, he possessed a distrust of “the masses” that bore much in common with such anti-Stalinist leftists as Dwight Macdonald. Written while on vacation in Acapulco, Mexico, the letter to Hazan reflected beliefs Williams came to after he “sat up

all night talking it over with a man who has made the profoundest study of such things I have ever come in contact with.”¹¹

The Tennessee Williams who wrote this letter argued that capitalism was in its death throes and that those in power were doing everything possible to keep the system going. The current state of crisis had come about because capitalism, which depended on constantly finding new markets, could not survive once “the new frontiers have been exhausted, the world is all explored, colonized, industrialized, developed.” Those with an interest in maintaining economic inequality had been forced to turn to other solutions.

Williams identified the New Deal and warfare as the two most important strategies designed to breathe life into the inherently dysfunctional capitalist system. “The new deal,” he argued, “has been a frantic effort to pump blood back in a dead system—an oxygen tank for an octogenarian.” He saw the initiatives of the Roosevelt administration as neither true reforms nor permanent solutions; rather, he believed that “through government spending the masses have been given new money to pay the profiteers to re-open their closed plants. This is just makeshift and the steadily increasing deficit makes it impossible to go on much longer.”¹² Williams’s critique of New Deal liberalism placed him firmly in the left wing of American politics.

Warfare was a similarly doomed effort to salvage capitalism. In this view wars occurred between countries competing for new markets when “no longer able to sell their surplus at home, because they have exploited their workers to the point of absolute impotence to buy.” Countries went to war to “obtain foreign markets on which to dump

¹¹ Tennessee Williams to Joseph Hazan, September 24 or 25, 1940[?], folder 54.11, Tennessee Williams Papers. The letter does not include a year, and while Williams alludes to World War Two, it is unclear whether or not the United States was officially involved at this point.

¹² Ibid.

these surpluses.” Only communism, because it obviated the profit motive, could break this cycle.¹³

If these views linked Williams to the segment of the left that hewed to classical Marxism, his view of “the masses” as brainwashed automatons incapable of thinking for themselves bore an intellectual kinship to the variety of American leftism that derived from the Frankfurt School, the group of European émigrés that included Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Herbert Marcuse. The exposure of these intellectuals to European fascism led them to a primary interest in the erosion of free thought under totalitarianism. Moreover, they made cultural production and consumption into key points of contestation. In the postwar United States, their ideas would be simplified and widely disseminated, eventually put to the service of both the left and the right.

Like certain members of the Frankfurt School and their native-born analogues, Tennessee Williams blamed the resilience of capitalism on the “cupidity” of employers and the “stupidity” of “the masses.” As he put it, “the masses are so dumb they don’t recognize what has happened to them and the capitalists are so cupidacious [*sic*] they won’t tell them.” The system continued to function, he argued, not only because those who profited from it were doing everything they could to hide from the public its inevitable disintegration but also because “the STUPIDITY of the masses enables them to keep” their power. The capitalists, finally, “will go and are already going Fascist to save themselves. The people through their STUPIDITY will once more be sold down the river by the CUPIDITY of the owners.” Although Williams pointed out that capitalism

¹³ Ibid.

functioned by hiding from the working classes their own exploited status, he also clearly believed that part of the blame lay with “the masses” themselves.¹⁴

Ultimately, Williams saw communism as the only potential bulwark against fascism and totalitarianism, to which America was already falling prey. He believed that the country was entering “the last phase in which a final choice must be made. Between FASCISM and COMMUNISM, the only two feasible substitutes for the Democratic or Capitalistic system.” He preferred the latter for several reasons: communism “does n[o]t, like Fascis[m], take away the liberties of labor but rather enfranchises labor completely, it “is not nationalistic or belligerent or racial,” and “it is benign while Fascism is malignant.” He believed that

COMMUNISM and the WORLD REVOLUTION are the only ways out. Complete abolition of the profit system, elimination of middle-man, direct distribution of goods, state and communal ownership of all natural resources and public necessities to eliminate slavery—these simple things would crea[t]e a new world order in which...war fare and injustice and crime and want and almost every other social evil would pass out of existence.¹⁵

Communism, he believed at this point, would bring about a gentler world, a world without racism, bigotry, violence, and poverty. In a communist America, Williams argued, it would be impossible to judge, ostracize, and persecute the people with whom he identified. Were America to become fascist, by contrast, there would be immediate concrete and personal repercussions for Williams, making the country “well nigh impossible to live in during the remainder of our generation.” He wrote, “gentle ideals were impotent enough before—what will become of them now? What will become of *us*? What will become of our passion for truth in this great Battle of Lies? Who can we

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

speak to, who can we write for—what can we *say*? Nothing but GOD BLESS AMERICA!—Oh, GOD, Joe—we have to get out and stay out of this damnable mess till it's over!"¹⁶

A scant ten years later, Tennessee Williams had reversed his positions on capitalism and communism, although he maintained his overarching concern with authoritarian regimes that deprived people of their humanity. For instance, he spent the summer of 1950 fearing for the fate of western Europe. As he wrote to his friend Cheryl Crawford, a theatrical producer and one of the founders of the Group Theatre and the Actors Studio, he feared that the Marshall Plan, which pumped billions of dollars of aid into the region in part to stem the flow of communism, would not work. He argued after a visit to Rome that “our dollars, our Marshall Plan, have not given them the spiritual transfusion which they most need, the sign of a future that is not a continuation of the past which they breathe in the dusty air of their ruined city.” He suspected “that the only way we can save western Europe from what we are afraid of [its fall to communism] is by some ideological process in ourselves beyond armaments and dollars. This meant “transposing our democracy into a major key which is dynamic and fluid and truly representing the lightness and freedom that we know totalitarianism doesn't offer.”¹⁷

Yet, totalitarianism was not a sickness that affected only the Soviet bloc; it could easily infect the United States as well. Indeed, Williams argued that McCarthyism, which emerged as a response to communism, was itself a form of totalitarianism. In the spring of 1954, he voiced these concerns to the State Department, which had recently

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Tennessee Williams to Cheryl Crawford, July 14, 1950, folder 2.39, Cheryl Crawford Papers, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts [hereafter “Cheryl Crawford Papers”].

denied a passport to fellow playwright Arthur Miller. Miller's play *The Crucible*, which equated the tactics of the House Un-American Activities Committee and McCarthy with witchhunting in Salem, Massachusetts, had premiered in New York City the previous year.

Williams wrote that Miller's politics and artistry were both beyond reproach. He was convinced "that there is nothing in Arthur Miller's work, or my personal acquaintance with him, that suggests to me the possibility that he is helpful or sympathetic to the Communist or any other subversive cause." Indeed, he insisted that Miller was "one man that I could never suspect of telling a lie, and he has categorically stated that he has *not* supported Communism or been a Communist." Equally important, "not one" of Miller's plays "contains anything but the most profound human sympathy and nobility of spirit that the American theatre has shown in our time and perhaps in any time before."¹⁸

What is most striking about this letter, however, are the reasons Williams gave for opposing artistic censorship. Drawing on a prominent discourse of the time, he insisted that these actions would actually hurt the United States, making it more likely that European nations would align themselves with the Soviet Union. He wrote that

since I have been spending summers abroad since 1948, I am in a position to tell you that Mr. Miller and his work occupy the very highest critical and popular position in the esteem of Western Europe, and this action [denying Miller a passport] can only serve to implement the Communist propaganda, which holds that our country is persecuting its finest artists and renouncing the principles of freedom on which our ancestors founded it.

He ended the letter with something that approached a threat: "I don't think you have properly estimated the enormous injury that an action of this kind can do our country," he

¹⁸ Tennessee Williams to the State Department, April 1, 1954, folder 56.10, Tennessee Williams Papers.

wrote, “even in the minds of those who are still prejudiced in our favor in Western Europe.”¹⁹

Williams thus turned the discourse of McCarthyism on its head, arguing that the repression of civil liberties and artistic freedom would lead to America’s defeat in the Cold War. At the same time, he re-affirmed his belief in America’s essential goodness, implying that McCarthyism was a distortion, not an accurate representation, of American values.

Williams took a different view of the postwar United States in less formal writing. So inevitable in the playwright’s eyes was the nation’s decline into fascism and totalitarianism that at one point he went so far as to argue that America was “an ideal backdrop for another Hitler.”²⁰ As he wrote in 1953 to his friend, the poet Oliver Wendell Evans, “I dread going back to the United States. I feel that the country is simply galloping into totalitarianism, now, what I see in the papers and magazines strikes terror in me.”²¹ Coincidentally or not, this was the same year that Eisenhower had made barring homosexuals from federal employment one of the first priorities of his presidency.

How, then, was one to combat this rampant totalitarianism? For Tennessee Williams, the answer was the expression of his authentic self through art. Historian James Gilbert has recently recounted a 1957 interview in which Tennessee Williams described his writing as “a form of therapy.” As Gilbert sees it, “this sort of self-analytical remark came easily to writers because it had become more acceptable in the

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Tennessee Williams to Guthrie McClintic, undated letter, folder 56.1, Tennessee Williams Papers.

²¹ Tennessee Williams to Oliver Wendell Evans, October 7, 1953, folder 54.9, Tennessee Williams Papers.

1950s to open up one's psychological interior than to express unpopular or dissenting political and social opinions."²² Certainly Williams did believe in the therapeutic benefits art offered to the artist. However, other writings indicate that, to the playwright, psychology and political dissent were not necessarily mutually exclusive. Rather, he believed that "opening up one's psychological interior" was what made social change possible. As the next section will show, Williams developed a complex political-aesthetic theory that depended on particular relationships among the artist, the artwork, and the audience. If the play were an authentic enough expression of the artist's true self, he believed, the audience could not help but identify with the characters on stage and, as a consequence, recognize their common humanity and be moved to greater kindness and understanding in their real lives.

Accordingly, the first step for Williams was to preserve and protect what he thought of as his true, authentic self. It is in this context that Williams's ambivalence toward psychiatry, which he feared would make it impossible to create the kind of art that would bring about social change, should be understood. In his view modern society and psychiatry were impediments to the expression of the authentic self. He blamed psychiatry for robbing people, artists in particular, of their own individual truth in favor of conforming to social demands.

While he did once ask his friend Cheryl Crawford to help him find a psychiatrist—Williams suggested Alfred Kinsey, of whom he was fond, seemingly unaware that Kinsey was not, in fact, a psychiatrist—it was a request he made with some trepidation. This was in part due to what he witnessed in fellow playwright William Inge after the latter underwent psychiatric treatment. "I don't want Inge's man," wrote

²² Gilbert, 167.

Williams, “I don’t like what he has done with Inge who seems to be living in a state of false complacency, peaceful on the surface, but with an apparent suspension of his critical faculties at least regarding his own work.” If psychiatry robbed Williams’s colleague of a healthy sense of opposition to mainstream society, it also took away his creativity, affecting him with “an ‘afflatus’ that only makes him pompously self-satisfied and showing bad scripts around like fresh-plucked flowers.”²³

It was precisely the opposite of the “complacency” he saw in Inge that Williams sought to manifest in his own art. Indeed, he went so far as to argue that his own emotional distress made his work better. His faith in *Orpheus Descending*, a 1957 play that, like much of Williams’s oeuvre, contrasts the dullness of convention with the allure of wildness, was based on the fact that “there is torment in that play.” Williams went on to suggest that “perhaps if I had not been so tormented myself it would have been less authentic.” Not only was authentic art an outgrowth of the artist’s own experiences, but also the quality of art was directly proportional to the suffering of the artist.²⁴

In making this argument, Williams drew on the idea, which derived from Nietzsche and manifested itself in such works as Ken Kesey’s *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, of the artist as outsider. In a popular expression of this discourse, the young British existentialist Colin Wilson argued that the role of the artist was to tell the truth about the world, even—or especially—if this truth was unpleasant. “*The truth,*”

²³ Tennessee Williams to Cheryl Crawford, undated letter, folder 2.39, Cheryl Crawford Papers. Although the letter itself is undated, Michael Paller dates the request to 1954. He further points out that Williams *did*, in 1957, end up with “Inge’s man”—the eminent Lawrence S. Kubie, a protégé of Karen Horney (herself a protégé of Freud). Kubie had played a key role in redefining homosexuality as a sickness to be cured (as opposed to a crime to be punished) during World War Two. Their relationship only lasted a year, in part because, as Williams later told it, Kubie encouraged him to give up both writing and homosexuality. See Paller, 117-31.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

Wilson wrote, “*must be told at all costs.*”²⁵ Born into “a world without values,” the outsider yearned for a “true ‘I,’” for an identity that was not just a role or a performance.²⁶ The main duty of the outsider was to “combat...man’s tendency to sleep, to do things mechanically.”²⁷ In the United States, these ideas found expression not only in the creative works of 1950s artists like Tennessee Williams, but also in the politics of the following decade’s student left.

Williams believed, that is, that only art that reflected the world’s suffering could effect social change. A letter to the eminent theatre critic Walter Kerr, who criticized Williams’s play *Camino Real*, provides a distillation of the playwright’s perspective. First, he tried to convince the critic that his play, which Kerr dismissed as “nightmarish,” was in fact a reflection of reality. Second, he implored the critic to acknowledge that the presentation of this reality was the only way to bring about social change, asking if he “recognize[d] it as a very earnest plea for certain fundamental, simply Christian, attributes of the human heart, through which we might still survive?”²⁸ It was not just that these “attributes of the human heart” would allow one to survive the nightmare of reality. Rather, Williams believed that this sort of theatre could affect how people treated one another in their real lives.

Because the point of art was to connect people despite their “superficial” differences, Williams believed it necessary that art grow not only out of an individual’s real-life experiences, but also out of *anguished* real-life experiences. This was true of his

²⁵ Colin Wilson, *The Outsider* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1956), 15.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 143, 147.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 267.

²⁸ Tennessee Williams to Mr. Kerr, undated letter, folder 2.39, Cheryl Crawford Papers. The play in question was probably *Camino Real*.

own work, the work of his friends, and the work of other artists whom he admired. It was a theme he developed over the course of several years.

Williams reacted with joy, for example, to the news that his friend Oliver Wendell Evans was writing a novel. He admired Evans as a poet and had defended him against unfavorable reviews, arguing that the narrowness of the critics' own experiences led them to resent the "sensual satisfaction and richness of experience" expressed in Evans's verse.²⁹ He believed, however, that poetry did not present a broad enough canvas to contain the richness of Evans's experience, insisting instead that "I've always felt that the latitude and depth of your experience and being would find its most complete and powerful expression in prose."³⁰

He also admired other artists who seemed to share this philosophy. He kept the letters of the Romantic poet Lord Byron close by so he could "browse among them every night."³¹ He was drawn to the personal writings of D.H. Lawrence, Katharine Mansfield, and Vincent Van Gogh, whose true selves he believed were expressed more through their art than through anything else. At the heart of any work of art that represented its creator's true self, Williams believed, were "universal" characteristics: passion, compassion, and beauty. "Read the collected letters of D.H. Lawrence, the journal and letters of Katherine Mansfield, of Vincent Van Gogh," he implored his friend Joseph Hazan:

How bitterly and relentlessly they fought their way through! Sensitive beyond endurance and yet *enduring*! Of course Van Gogh went mad in the end and

²⁹ Tennessee Williams to Oliver Wendell Evans, July 13, 1950, folder 54.9, Tennessee Williams Papers.

³⁰ Tennessee Williams to Oliver Wendell Evans, February 20, 1952, folder 54.9, Tennessee Williams Papers.

³¹ Tennessee Williams to Cheryl Crawford, January 22, 1954, folder 2.39, Cheryl Crawford Papers.

Mansfield and Lawrence both fought a losing battle with degenerative disease—T.B.—but their work is a pure shaft rising out of that physical defeat. A permanent, pure, incorruptible thing, far more real, more valid than their physical entities ever were. They cry aloud to you in their work as [crossed out]—no, *more* vividly, intimately, personally than they could have cried out to you with their living tongues. They *live*, they aren't dead. That is the one ineluctable gift of the artist, to project himself beyond time and space through grasp and communion with eternal values...isn't there beauty in their passion, so much of which is replete with the purest compassion?...let's cling tenaciously to our conviction that this is the only reality worth our devotion, and let that belief sustain us through our black "tunnels."³²

Williams admired the poet Walt Whitman for the same reasons. Like Lawrence, Mansfield, and Van Gogh, all of whom used art to express universal truths, Whitman used art to connect people to one another. As Williams wrote, "you seem to feel that what he [Whitman] admires, and is confident of, in himself is himself in life: that he does not separate himself from it. And the consoling things he says to himself seem really to be addressed to other people *through* himself. He understood the *unanimity* of mankind. That is the spirit from which an *advanced democracy* should have sprung, by-passing the Stalinist crowd."³³ This was precisely what Williams hoped to accomplish through his own work.

Critics, however, were not always eager to embrace the idea that art should be a reflection of the artist's inner self. Williams did not hesitate to respond to these critics, especially those who charged that his work was repetitive. He argued that the work could change only if and when the inner self changed, and the inner self changed very slowly. "The trouble is," he wrote, "that you can't make any real philosophical progress in a couple of years. The scope of understanding enlarges quite slowly, if it enlarges at all,

³² Tennessee Williams to Joseph Hazan, September 3, 1940, folder 54.11, Tennessee Williams Papers.

³³ Tennessee Williams to Cheryl Crawford, August 11, 1950, folder 2.39, Cheryl Crawford Papers, emphasis in original.

and the scope of interest seems to wait upon understanding.” Critics who demanded more misunderstood this dilemma of “all artists who work from the inside out.” Artists, Williams insisted, “cannot make sudden, arbitrary changes of matter and treatment until the inner man is ripe for it,” which meant that artistic development could only occur when the artist focused on “keeping alive and growing as much as you can.”³⁴

He asked that critics be sensitive to “the writer’s need for a gradual ripening or development,” arguing that to demand otherwise could be disastrous to the artist. In attempts to develop faster than was natural, Williams argued, “many artists have smashed themselves up...and painfully often their critics have collaborated in the smash-up.” Because true art was supposed to come from one’s true self, and because this self was slow to change, repetition was to be expected. If an idea was worth exploring, Williams argued, “it may take a number of individual works to fully explore it.”³⁵

At times, critics rejected Williams’s work not because they disagreed that art should be a reflection of the artist’s authentic self, but because they found his attempts to express this self too ugly and threatening. When *Time* magazine referred to his characters as “human garbage,” he accused them of “critical McCarthyism.” “An artist,” he wrote, “must portray, as honestly as he can, what he knows. I have always done so.”³⁶

Yet, this expression of the artist’s true, authentic self through her or his art was not important only as an emotional outlet—“a form of therapy”—for the cultural producer. Rather, this aesthetic choice was also a political one, for it was calculated to have a specific effect on the audience. To Williams, the performance was ultimately not a

³⁴ Tennessee Williams to Brooks Atkinson, undated letter, folder 54.1, Tennessee Williams Papers.

³⁵ Tennessee Williams to Max Lerner, March 19, 1951, folder 54.15, Tennessee Williams Papers.

³⁶ Tennessee Williams to *Time* magazine, undated [1957?], folder 56.10, Tennessee Williams Papers.

venue through which the playwright could express his or her beliefs in an attempt to influence the audience but rather one in which, through the medium of the play, artist and audience alike could recognize one another's inherent humanity:

It's almost impossible for me to explore or create without an audience. I must have that responsive mind, that understanding thought to express to...I don't want to tell the world which man to vote for, but I do want to tell the worl[d]...nuts, I don't want to tell "the world" anything...I want to tell a person, or persons, something...I want to tell a person to think, and feel, and to love himself and other persons so that he votes out of a deep conviction. I want people to look at both sides, or all sides, or as many sides as they can manage. When they condemn other human beings, I want them to be at least conscious of the possibility of guilt, evil what have you in their own thoughts. And when they watch the condemners, they must know that they, too, could be condemners...Oh this is impossible to say tonight. Sort of a deified EMPATHY...There have been times when I felt that no one should ever communicate with me except through my work. It's the only time when I'm *really* honest, really whole...³⁷

In this view, theatre functioned as a form of communication that was indirectly (but not explicitly) political.

Jill Dolan has recently argued that live theatre has a special role to play as a place where audience members come to recognize one another's common humanity, thus bringing about the possibility for social change. She has defined these "utopian performatives" as those

small but profound moments in which performance calls the attention of the audience in a way that lifts everyone slightly above the present, into a hopeful feeling of what the world might be like if every moment of our lives were as emotionally voluminous, generous, aesthetically striking, and intersubjectively intense.³⁸

³⁷ Tennessee Williams to Cheryl Crawford, May 20, 1960, folder 2.39, Cheryl Crawford Papers.

³⁸ Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 5.

It is easy to see in this argument echoes of Williams's call for the theatre to function as a place where artists and audience members could recognize and communicate with one another as individuals who shared a common bond.

Thus, although the short run of his 1953 play *Camino Real* upset him, Williams nonetheless maintained that "the work was done for exactly what it has gained, a communion with people." In contrast, "a published play is only a shadow of one and not even a clear shadow." In part this was because reading a play was a less intense experience than watching a fully-produced one. More importantly, Williams believed that the "ideas of an author, those shabby things snatched off basement counters at Gimbel's" could not compete with "the quick inter-play of live beings."³⁹ According to Williams, it was this "inter-play of live beings" that gave theatre its potential for effecting social change. Only when strangers sat next to each other in a darkened theatre watching human drama unfold in front of them could they become aware of the need for kindness and sensitivity in their real lives. As a gay man living in a dangerously repressive time, Williams felt this need for greater kindness and sensitivity on an acute, immediate level.

The playwright developed these theories, that is, not in an abstract vacuum, but in the face of very real, concrete threats to his personal safety. While it is true that Williams was not openly homosexual to the general public until later in life and did not pursue a rights-based political agenda, this does not mean that he had internalized the homophobia of the time. Rather, his personal writings reveal that his sexuality was a source of great personal joy. Interestingly, these writings also involved a great deal of playacting, suggesting a measure of truth in Robert Corber's claims regarding Williams's nascent postmodernism. In letters to Oliver Wendell Evans, the two assumed female identities,

³⁹ Tennessee Williams to Brooks Atkinson, June 7 or 8, 1953, folder 54.1, Tennessee Williams Papers.

writing to each other either as mother and daughter or as members of a convent. These tropes were juxtaposed against clear euphemisms for sexual activity, including allusions to “Our Lady of the Steam Room” and the “Sisters of our beloved Order of St. Vaseline.”⁴⁰

Williams also wrote with awareness of and concern for the regular beatings, murders, and arrests perpetrated against individuals solely because of their “deviant” gender or sexual identity. As he noted in an April, 1950, letter written to Oliver Wendell Evans from Key West, Florida, “last month a 43-year old queen was clubbed to death by an ash-tray and a sailor, and as a reprisal for this terrible offense on the part of the queen, all the Bohemians in town are being picked up on the street and booked for vagrancy, given heavy fines and twelve hours to get off the Key. There are 16 different kinds of vagrancy in Florida law and I’m sure Frank [Merlo, Williams’s longtime partner] and I, and perhaps even grandfather would come under at least one of them.”⁴¹ Two years later, he wrote full of disgust to Evans, again from Key West, that “another queen hit the dust lately. She picked up dirt and was so severely chastised that she was not recognizable. Her eye-sockets, the bone, was knocked in two inches from original position. She received 32 head-wounds anyone [*sic*] of which was sufficiently violent to kill her...It struck terror to my heart, this little incident, and I do not venture far afield.”⁴²

It is true that the solutions Williams sought to end hatred, bigotry, and homophobia were not “political” in the traditional sense. Rather, his aesthetic philosophy

⁴⁰ Tennessee Williams to Oliver Wendell Evans, undated, folder 54.9, Tennessee Williams Papers.

⁴¹ Tennessee Williams to Oliver Wendell Evans, April 7, 1950, folder 54.9, Tennessee Williams Papers.

⁴² Tennessee Williams to Oliver Wendell Evans, February 20, 1952, folder 54.9, Tennessee Williams Papers.

was his politics. First, if homosexuality was a part of one's authentic self—neither a crime, a sickness, *nor* a social construction in the later Foucauldian sense—it could not be deemed deviant. Second, Williams believed that, were audiences presented with authentic theatrical experiences, they could not help but recognize the fundamental sameness of all human beings, thus increasing understanding and ending prejudice.

Given Williams's faith in the utilitarian value of art, it at first glance seems strange that he would have been loathe to embrace explicitly didactic art. Unlike cultural front artists of the 1930s, Williams equated didactic art, which he saw as substituting genuine emotional reactions with a prescribed series of responses, with totalitarianism itself. He was reluctant to use his fame to influence people's beliefs, condemning in equal measure liberal and conservative performers. "I detest the practice of campaigning showfolks," he wrote, "you know, the Bogarts and Bacalls, the Dunnes and the Warings." What few attempts he made to infuse his plays with explicitly political matter fell flat because he "was too conscious of influencing through emotion and entertainment." He saw great danger in telling his audiences how to feel, insisting instead that "I want to encourage first of all, personal freedom. I loathe slavery of any kind but particularly the slavery of conformity, fear, bestiality, self-imposed slavery. I want to strengthen the feeblest attempts to break out into creativity." Because he sought this freedom for himself, Williams felt that "it didn't seem fair" not to grant the same kind of freedom to his audiences.⁴³

⁴³ Tennessee Williams to Cheryl Crawford, May 20, 1960, folder 2.39, Cheryl Crawford Papers. Interestingly, Williams had not always held this view. As he wrote to friend Anne Targ in 1943, "World society always seems to be in a state of blind panic, or a state of sterile apathy. The play's interior meaning is a plea for an open mind as a preface to action. I think the second scene in which these ideas are most explicitly expressed could be sent to somebody like Mrs. Roosevelt who might be willing to endorse the views publicly. That, of course, would be immeasurably good as publicity. Other public figures with

Tennessee Williams was likely aware of the debates about the audience that had been swirling around him since the 1930s. While theorists like Bertolt Brecht and Walter Benjamin insisted that cultural consumption could be put in the service of progressive politics, Theodor Adorno and the anti-Stalinist leftists (who by the 1950s would become ardent Cold Warriors) argued that “mass culture” turned people into mindless automatons. Meanwhile, cultural front artists shared with Brecht the belief that culture could be political, but they were equally convinced that it must be accessible and decipherable to “ordinary” people.

Williams’s own ideas about the audience shared certain elements with these theories, but he did not adopt any of them wholesale. While he shared with Brecht, for example, the belief that theatre could bring about social change, he would have disagreed with Brecht that identification with the play and its characters functioned as an impediment to social change. Rather, identification with the characters on stage was the first step to effecting social change in the real world. Williams’s theories also differed from the belief espoused by Adorno and others that cultural consumption robbed audience members of their individuality and transformed them into a homogenous mass susceptible to totalitarianism. To Williams, audience members’ recognition of their fundamental sameness not only did not threaten individuality but also functioned as a bulwark against totalitarianism.

known liberal views would possibly be good for the same purpose.” Tennessee Williams to Anne Targ, October 5, 1943, folder 56.10, Tennessee Williams Papers.

Williams developed a theory of spectatorship dependent on involving the audience in what he termed “the timeless world of the play.”⁴⁴ What made theatre important, he argued, was its sense of “timelessness.” Timelessness was what allowed audience members to sympathize with the characters on stage and begin to see that such sympathy was necessary in real life as well. In his introduction to the published version of his 1951 play *The Rose Tattoo*, Williams provided a detailed explanation of why and how this was to occur, beginning with the example of his contemporary Arthur Miller’s most famous character, *Death of a Salesman*’s Willy Loman. Williams agreed with the London critic who argued that “Willy Loman was the sort of man that almost any member of the audience would have kicked out of an office had he applied for a job or detained one for conversation about his troubles.” However, he asked his readers to “suppose there had been no wrist watch or office clock and suppose there had *not* been the schedule of pressing appointments,” imagining instead “that the meeting with Willy Loman had somehow occurred in a world *outside* of time.” Williams believed that, away from the hustle and bustle of real life, people would be much more inclined to view Willy Loman sympathetically, “receiv[ing] him with concern and kindness and even with respect.” Drama, Williams believed, offered precisely this opportunity, and thus offered the possibility of greater understanding.⁴⁵

It was, moreover, the audience’s passive state that made them receptive to this timelessness. In the theatre, “the audience can sit back in a comforting dusk to watch a world which is flooded with light and in which emotion and action have a dimension and

⁴⁴ Tennessee Williams, “The Timeless World of a Play,” in *Three by Tennessee* (New York: Signet Classic, 1976), 129.

⁴⁵ Williams, “The Timeless World of a Play,” 129-30.

dignity that they would likely have in real existence, if only the shattering illusion of time could be locked out.” As Williams wrote,

Because we do not participate, except as spectators, we can view them clearly, within the limits of our emotional equipment. These people on the stage do not return our looks. We do not have to answer their questions nor make any sign of being in company with them, nor do we have to compete with their virtues nor resist their offenses. All at once, for this reason, we are able to *see* them! Our hearts are wrung by recognition and pity, so that the dusky shell of the auditorium where we are gathered anonymously together is flooded with an almost liquid warmth of unchecked human sympathies, relieved of self-consciousness, allowed to function...⁴⁶

Theatre-going not only allowed people to experience their emotions more fully than they could in real life but also encouraged them to apply these lessons to the real world. This perspective, moreover, was in direct contrast to the prevailing postwar belief that audience passivity would lead to totalitarianism.

What Williams’s political-aesthetic theory could not account for, however, were the material experiences of the performers in his plays, particularly in light of his close association with Method acting. 1958’s *Suddenly Last Summer*, which, like many of Williams’s plays, depicts a young woman struggling to survive and/or maintain her sanity in the face of overwhelming, and overwhelmingly repressive, social forces, provides the means to analyze these unexamined aspects. In this particular example, the young woman, Catherine Holly, has witnessed the horrific death of her cousin, Sebastian Venable. The play unfolds as a power struggle between Catherine and her aunt and patron, Violet Venable, who is unable to accept the truth of her son Sebastian’s life and death, which, in another classic Williams trope, was connected to sexual acts alluded to but never named. In order to stop Catherine from “babbling,” as Mrs. Venable refers to it throughout the play, the older woman attempts to coerce a young doctor, Dr. Cukrowicz,

⁴⁶ Ibid., 131.

into giving her niece a lobotomy. Both the play and the film version released the following year offer stunning opportunities to explore the themes of surveillance and spectatorship, authenticity and performance, truth and falsity, secret-keeping and confession. In the end, confession (telling the story of Sebastian's death in front of a crowd of spectators) is what saves Catherine from having to undergo the operation, for Dr. Cukrowicz realizes the truth in her words. For the actress playing Catherine, however, the structure of the play, were she a Method actress, would have dictated a very different, not necessarily liberating, experience. Rather, she would have had to draw on and re-live experiences emotionally analogous not only to witnessing her cousin's murder, but also to repeated sexual violence and incarceration. It was likely no coincidence that Williams later defined the appeal of Anne Meacham, the actress who originated the role of Catherine, less in terms of her beauty and more "because there's nothing she won't say or do on a stage without any sign of embarrassment."⁴⁷ *Suddenly Last Summer* thus illustrates both sides of the culture of authenticity's demand for revealing secrets: for Catherine and her creator, Tennessee Williams, it was a savior; for the actress playing Catherine, it would have had far more complicated ramifications. I will trace these themes through an analysis of both the play, which premiered in New York City on January 7, 1958, and starred, in addition to Meacham, Hortense Alden as Mrs. Venable and Robert Lansing as Dr. Cukrowicz, and the 1959 film, which was directed by Joseph Mankiewicz from a screenplay by Williams and Gore Vidal and starred Katherine Hepburn, Elizabeth Taylor, and Montgomery Clift in the three main roles.

⁴⁷ Tennessee Williams, "Tennessee, Never Talk to an Actress," *New York Times*, May 4, 1969.

As the play begins, it is the late summer of 1937. Mrs. Venable, “a lady...[who has] light orange or pink hair and wears a lavender lace dress, and over her withered bosom is pinned a starfish of diamonds,” tells the young, “glacially brilliant, very, very good-looking” Dr. Cukrowicz about her son Sebastian, who has died at the age of forty during a recent trip to Cabeza de Lobo (Head of the Wolf), Spain, with his cousin Catherine. Dr. Cukrowicz, whose Polish name is so difficult for his host that he allows her to call him “Doctor Sugar,” has been brought to the house, “a mansion of Victorian Gothic style in the Garden District of New Orleans,” to evaluate Catherine’s mental state, for Mrs. Venable is convinced her niece caused Sebastian’s death. In the film, it is made clear that Dr. Cukrowicz is from Chicago, compounding the foreign-ness of his ethnic background and making it even clearer that he is an outsider in the Anglo-Saxon, Protestant world of the southern gentry. Catherine’s “lies,” her aunt insists, will “collapse” in the face of her “truth.”⁴⁸

According to his mother, Sebastian’s defining feature was the inseparability of his life and his work. The only other aspect of Sebastian’s life she found equally important to convey to the doctor was his chastity. “You see,” she explains to the doctor, who has inquired after Sebastian’s occupation, “strictly speaking, his *life* was his occupation”:

...Sebastian was a poet! That’s what I meant when I said his life was his work because the work of a poet is the life of a poet and—vice versa, the life of a poet is the work of a poet, I mean you can’t separate them, I mean—well, for instance, a salesman’s work is one thing and his life is another—or can be. The same thing’s true of—doctor, lawyer, merchant, *thief!*—But a poet’s life is his work and his work is his life in a special sense because—oh, I’ve already talked myself breathless and dizzy.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Williams, *Suddenly Last Summer*, 9, 12-13.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

Mrs. Venable considers herself and Sebastian different from other, “ordinary” people whose work and life—whose occupations and true selves—had to remain separate. “Most people’s lives,” she insists, were nothing “but long trails of debris, each day more debris, more debris, long, long, trails of debris with nothing to clean it all up but, finally, death.” In the film, she suggests that “quiet desperation is the word for most lives,” an allusion to Thoreau. By contrast, she and Sebastian lived their lives as if they were creating art: “My son, Sebastian, and I constructed our days, each day, we would—carve out each day of our lives like a piece of sculpture.—Yes, we left behind us a trail of days like a gallery of sculpture!”⁵⁰ Each year, the two would spend the summer months traveling together, and over the course of these travels Sebastian would produce one poem. The other nine months were spent preparing to produce this poem—a gestational period, as Mrs. Venable quips to Dr. Cukrowicz. Sebastian had no desire for fame and fortune, however, choosing instead to keep his poems unpublished until after his death. “Sebastian had no public name as a poet,” his mother explains to the doctor, “he didn’t want one, he refused to have one. He *dreaded, abhorred!*—false values that come from being publicly known, from fame, from personal—exploitation...”⁵¹ Not only was art to be an expression—indeed, an extension—of the artist’s life, but also it was to be kept hidden from the corrupting influences of public consumption. By attributing this “closeting” of art to the play’s antagonist, however, Williams was criticizing, not endorsing, the idea that art should remain hidden.

Dr. Cukrowicz, too, has what he considers his art, complete with similar comparisons to childbearing: he is a pioneer in the field of psychosurgery. When Mrs.

⁵⁰Ibid., 26.

⁵¹ Ibid., 13.

Venable assumes that the doctor will find what she identifies as Sebastian's search for God pretentious, he insists that doctors, too, look for God. But while Sebastian looked for God through religious experimentation or, more surprisingly, the animal world's brutal interplay between predator and prey, Dr. Cukrowicz believes that the closest he has come to spiritual communion is through surgery. As an example of doctors' search for God, he describes the first lobotomy he ever performed, which was on "a young girl regarded as hopeless and put in the Drum," the hospital's violent ward, so named "because it looks like the inside of a drum with very bright lights burning all day and all night.—So the attendants can see any change of expression or movement among the inmates in time to grab them if they're about to attack." (The Drum is literalized in the film version, and the full ramifications of its panoptic nature are discussed below). After the operation, he was so nervous that he stayed with the patient, "as if I'd delivered a child that might stop breathing." When she did awake, calm observations of the weather having replaced her previous "torrent of obscenities," he, too, felt peaceful.⁵²

However, the public mental hospital where Dr. Cukrowicz is a staff member, Lion's View, lacks the funds to support his vision. In the film, the first scene shows him performing a lobotomy in front of a panel of spectators (observing medical students), eventually throwing up his hands in disgust at the primitive conditions the hospital's budget demands he must work under. In the play, where the action is contained within Mrs. Venable's house and garden, this situation is merely discussed. As he explains to his host, the newness, radicalness, and riskiness of this procedure make it difficult to procure funding. Mrs. Venable offers to change this institutional penury through a sizable donation to Lion's View, but her generosity comes with its own price: funds will

⁵² Ibid. 17-19.

be disbursed only if Dr. Cukrowicz performs a lobotomy on Catherine—regardless of whether or not he determines the procedure is warranted by her medical condition.

As this first scene makes clear, Mrs. Venable inhabits a world in which secret-keeping is better than confession. She is unconcerned by the risks involved in a lobotomy, caring only that “it pacifies them [the patients], it quiets them down, it suddenly makes them peaceful...what a blessing to them, Doctor, to be just peaceful, to be just suddenly—peaceful...” Even Dr. Cukrowicz’s caution that he cannot guarantee that a lobotomy would end Catherine’s “babbling” does not dull the older woman’s enthusiasm, for she knows no one would take her niece’s story seriously after the operation. There is some textual evidence that suggests Mrs. Venable is not entirely convinced that Catherine’s story is *not* true (in the film, Katherine Hepburn’s performance admits even more ambiguity), but, regardless of any internal doubts, it is a truth that she cannot accept. Accordingly, Catherine’s story must be suppressed, and if it cannot be suppressed, it must be discredited. Catherine herself, who appears peeking through the window as her aunt exits at the end of the scene, represents the opposite tendency—the desire to tell the truth, no matter how painful.

In the following scene, Catherine waits in the garden with Sister Felicity, her chaperone from St. Mary’s, the private mental hospital where she is currently staying at Mrs. Venable’s expense. Willful—she intentionally puts out her forbidden cigarette in Sister Felicity’s hand—and clearly upset—it pains her to be in her cousin’s garden—she is also clearly not insane.⁵³ In fact, it is with a not insignificant amount of relief that she notes, “*I can still cry!*,” implying that the medication her doctors keep her on prevents her

⁵³ Ibid. 35-7.

from feeling.⁵⁴ When she notices the doctor staring at her through the window (a reversal of her spying on him at the end of the last scene), she realizes that her aunt intends to send her to Lion's View. She insists that she loved Sebastian and was only trying to save him. "I tried to hold onto his hand," she remembers, distraught, "but he struck me away and ran, ran, ran in the wrong direction!" Despite Catherine's discovery of his presence, the doctor continues to watch. His blond hair "catches the light," giving him away, and Catherine is reminded of Sebastian, who at the end of his life remarked that he was "famished for blonds." "That's how he talked about people," she explains, "as if they were—items on a menu." This brief scene ends with Catherine's mother calling to her from off-stage.⁵⁵

In scene three, it becomes clear that Dr. Cukrowicz is not the only one whose financial situation leaves him susceptible to Mrs. Venable's manipulations. Mrs. Holly, Catherine's mother and the sister of Mrs. Venable's late husband, and George Holly, Catherine's younger brother and a student at Tulane, join her in the garden. Described by Williams as "a fatuous Southern lady who requires no other description," Mrs. Holly also has a calculating side.⁵⁶ This is doubly true of George, who in the play comes across as cold, even cruel, but in the film is portrayed as a bumbling naïf. To Mrs. Venable, however, all three of the Hollys are vultures. As Mrs. Holly and George explain to Catherine, Sebastian's will leaves \$50,000 each to Catherine and George. Mrs. Venable is determined to fight this bequeathal, keeping the will in probate for as long as possible and, if necessary, hiring a lawyer to fight it in court. However, she may abandon this

⁵⁴ Ibid. 37.

⁵⁵ Ibid. 38-40.

⁵⁶ Ibid. 41.

fight if Catherine likewise abandons her story of Sebastian's death. Mrs. Holly and George urge her to do so—even if the story is true. Catherine, however, points out that she could not drop her story even if she wanted to, for the doctor is planning to give her an injection that will leave her without “any choice but to tell exactly what happened in Cabeza de Lobo last summer.” “Don't you see?,” she asks, “I won't have any choice but to tell the truth. It [the injection] makes you tell the truth because it shuts something off that might make you able to and *everything* comes out, decent or *not* decent, you have no control, but always, always the truth!”⁵⁷ Mrs. Venable begins to enter before Mrs. Holly and George are able to change Catherine's mind, and the scene ends. The play's final scene and climax is a showdown between the two main characters.

The bulk of this scene, the play's longest by far, is devoted to Catherine's confession/performance of what happened to Sebastian in Cabeza de Lobo. Less an uninterrupted monologue than a heightened, tense interplay of competing truths, this scene finally reveals, even as it keeps hidden, what really happened to the poet. In Mrs. Venable's version of the truth, Catherine is guilty of sexual indiscretion, manipulating Sebastian into taking her to Europe, and even her cousin's death. In Catherine's version, her “indiscretion” was rape, her trip to Europe was due to Mrs. Venable's stroke, and her relationship with Sebastian was intended to save him. “I can't change the truth,” she cries, “I'm not God! I'm not even sure that He could, I don't think God can change truth! How can I change the story of what happened to her son in Cabeza de Lobo?”⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Ibid. 45.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 57-8.

At this point, the doctor, who, according to the stage directions, has been “calmly observing the scene, with detachment,” decides to intervene.⁵⁹ He asks to speak to Catherine, who at her aunt’s cruel words has fled to the garden, alone. Here, away from Mrs. Venable’s attacks, she begins to reveal her side of the story. The real reason that Sebastian had taken her, and not his mother, to Europe that summer was that her stroke had rendered her useless to him. “It [the stroke] was disfiguring,” Catherine notes, “and after that, Sebastian couldn’t use her.”⁶⁰ It was not until later, however, that Catherine understood this. In the meantime, Catherine tells the doctor, she devoted herself to trying to save her cousin from “completing—a sort of!—*image!*—he had of himself as a sort of!—*sacrifice* to a!—*terrible* sort of a” God.⁶¹ At least in this, Catherine and her aunt, who earlier described Sebastian in precisely such terms, are in agreement. As Catherine tells it, however, the events leading to Sebastian’s death actually began much earlier, while she was participating in society events under her aunt’s sponsorship the previous winter. Her affair with the married man, she tells the doctor, was no consensual act (in the film, it is clear that Catherine has been raped more than once, and sexual harassment is a constant part of her life). Ever since then, she has felt that her life isn’t real. As she tells the doctor, “my feelings are the sort of feelings that you have in a dream... Suddenly last winter I began to write in my journal in the third person.”⁶² The very next morning, Catherine explains,

I started writing my diary in the third person singular, such as “She’s still living this morning,” meaning that *I* was...—“WHAT’S NEXT FOR HER? GOD

⁵⁹ Ibid. 58.

⁶⁰ Ibid. 62.

⁶¹ Ibid. 64.

⁶² Ibid. 64.

KNOWS!”—I couldn’t go out anymore.—However one morning my Cousin Sebastian came in my bedroom and said: “Get up!”—Well...if you’re still alive after dying, well then, you’re obedient, Doctor.—I got up. He took me downtown to a place for passport photos. Said: “Mother can’t go abroad with me this summer. You’re going to go with me this summer instead of Mother.”—If you don’t believe me, read my journal of Paris!—“She woke up at daybreak this morning, had her coffee and dressed and took a brief walk”—...*She did. I did...*⁶³

Catherine’s attack left her feeling cut off from herself, her emotions, and her experiences. She had become a spectator of her own life.

Dr. Cukrowicz decides to give Catherine an injection, in exchange asking her to give up her “resistance” to “the truth.” Although Catherine insists that “the truth’s the one thing I have never resisted,” she also notes that truth resides “at the bottom of a bottomless well” (in the film, this is one of Sebastian’s favorite aphorisms). However, she does agree to the doctor’s instructions to tell “the absolutely true story. No lies, nothing not spoken. Everything told, exactly.” When George, Mrs. Holly, and Mrs. Venable join Catherine and the doctor in the garden, she begins.⁶⁴

As Catherine describes the events in Cabeza de Lobo, the light, as the stage directions indicate, “gradually changes...the light concentrates on Catherine, the other figures sink into shadows.”⁶⁵ Catherine is alone with her memories. In Cabeza de Lobo, where Sebastian bought her a white swimsuit that became see-through when wet, it became clear to Catherine why her cousin had invited her to travel with him—she was to be bait for the young men whom Sebastian would be too shy to approach himself. “I was PROCURING for him!”⁶⁶ Catherine shouts. Moreover, Mrs. Venable had (perhaps

⁶³ Ibid. 66.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 67-72.

⁶⁵ Ibid. 79-80.

⁶⁶ Ibid. 81.

unknowingly) played this same role for Sebastian prior to her stroke. As the summer wore on, however, Sebastian needed Catherine less and less, as poor young boys who lived on the free public beach next to their paid stretch flocked to meet Sebastian in a nearby bathhouse in exchange for money. As knowledge of this exchange grew, so, too, did the crowd, eventually to a size that frightened Sebastian, and he and Catherine stopped going to the beach.⁶⁷

Their troubles did not end there, however. A few days later, Catherine and Sebastian were eating lunch in an open-air restaurant that backed up to the beach, where a crowd of young people began to gather with instruments in tow. Many of the boys were familiar to Sebastian. The children began a cacophonous serenade, which built in volume until Sebastian demanded that the restaurant make them stop. The waiters began beating the children away, and Catherine and Sebastian left the restaurant. Emerging on the street, they found the children waiting for them. Catherine tried to convince Sebastian to go back inside and call a cab, but he refused, instead running off in a panic. The band of children followed, pursuing Sebastian through the streets of Cabeza de Lobo and eventually up a hill to what is portrayed in the film as a sacrificial altar. Catherine ran for help, but by the time she got to Sebastian, it was too late. “When we got back to where my Cousin Sebastian had disappeared in the flock of featherless little black sparrows,” Catherine explains both to her audience and the theatrical audience,

...he was lying naked as they had been naked against a white wall, and this you won't believe, nobody *has* believed it, nobody *could* believe it, nobody, nobody on earth could possibly believe it, and I don't *blame* them!—They had *devoured* parts of him... Torn or cut parts of him away with their hands or knives or maybe those jagged tin cans they made music with, they had torn bits of him away and stuffed them into those gobbling fierce little empty black mouths of theirs. There wasn't a sound any more, there was nothing to see but Sebastian, what was left of

⁶⁷ Ibid. 81-2.

him, that looked like a big white-paper-wrapped bunch of red roses that had been *torn, thrown, crushed!*—against that blazing white wall!⁶⁸

Unable to believe this story, Mrs. Venable jumps up to hit Catherine with her cane, but she is caught and led away by the doctor. (In the film, the story causes Mrs. Venable to undergo a complete break with reality; she regresses to a time when Sebastian was alive and believes the doctor is her son.) Both Mrs. Holly and George are deeply affected by Catherine's story, the former sobbing and the latter willing to let go of his dream of inheriting Sebastian's money. It is up to the doctor, however, to determine whether or not to accede to Mrs. Venable's demand that he "*cut this hideous story out of her brain!*" Although there is no definitive answer, the play ends with at least the possibility that Catherine will be saved; as the doctor muses immediately before the curtain, "I think we ought at least to consider the possibility that the girl's story could be true..."⁶⁹

In many ways, *Suddenly Last Summer* functions as a manifestation of Tennessee Williams's political-aesthetic theory described above. As in much of Williams's oeuvre, the play paints a picture of a world in which the sensitive and gentle are destroyed by the uncaring and powerful. One is reminded of the author's World War Two-era letter to Joseph Hazan, which noted with despair in the face of the world's seemingly inevitable turn to fascism that "gentle ideals were impotent enough before—what will become of them now? What will become of *us*? What will become of our passion for truth in this great Battle of Lies?"⁷⁰ In *Suddenly Last Summer*, this message is conveyed largely through the image of the "flesh-eating birds," a trope that recurs several times

⁶⁸ Ibid. 92.

⁶⁹ Ibid. 92-3.

⁷⁰ Tennessee Williams to Joseph Hazan, September 24 or 25, 1940[?], folder 54.11, Tennessee Williams Papers.

throughout. It is Mrs. Venable who first introduces the concept during her early conversation with the doctor about Sebastian's search for God. Many years ago, when she and Sebastian were in the Galapagos Islands, Sebastian became fascinated by the sea turtles who laid their eggs on the beach, leaving their vulnerable offspring to complete the treacherous journey to the ocean. According to the poet's estimates, "possibly only a hundredth of one per cent" of the newly hatched creatures would make it to their destination; the rest would be devoured by "the flesh-eating birds that made the sky almost as black as the beach!"⁷¹ As Sebastian and his mother watched,

...the birds hovered and swooped to attack and hovered and—swooped to attack! They were diving down on the hatched sea-turtles, turning them over to expose their soft undersides, tearing the undersides open and rending and eating their flesh.⁷²

In the film, Mrs. Venable supplements this observation by comparing Sebastian to "herbivorous dinosaurs," which "were just too gentle for their size." These creatures, she argues, went extinct because they refused to eat meat, unlike the carnivores who "inherited the earth—but then they always do, don't they?" In reality, of course, the gentleness Sebastian may have possessed had been wrung out of him by a repressive society, turning him into the carnivorous wolf, alluded to in the resort's name, who paid young boys for sex.

Sebastian predicted to both his mother and Catherine that his fate would be similar to that of the turtles, as indeed it was; the children who killed Sebastian were described as "featherless little black sparrows" that "had *devoured* parts of him."⁷³ While

⁷¹ Williams, *Suddenly Last Summer*, 15-17.

⁷² *Ibid.* 16.

⁷³ *Ibid.* 92.

aligning the children with the birds and Sebastian with the vulnerable turtles elides the exploitation the former suffered as a result of their crushing poverty, as Catherine points out elsewhere, Sebastian himself was no innocent. Rather, as noted above, he, too, could be described as a devouring bird; in the days before his death, Catherine explains, he hoped to leave Cabeza de Lobo because he was “famished for blonds, he was fed up with the dark ones and was famished for blonds...that’s how he talked about people, as if they were—items on a menu.—‘That one’s delicious-looking, that one is appetizing,’ or ‘that one is *not* appetizing.’”⁷⁴ Finally, the play’s central power struggle between Catherine and her aunt lends itself to seeing the former as a vulnerable turtle (albeit one who survives) and the latter as a devouring bird seeking to destroy her. In the film, Catherine also describes the man who raped her after the Mardi Gras ball as “ravenous.” While there is no evidence that Williams intended *Suddenly Last Summer* to be an explicitly anti-fascist statement, it is worth remembering that this was the context in which he conceived of the battle between truth and lies and kindness and cruelty. Given the nature of Sebastian’s demise, it is also worth noting that Williams linked fascism and totalitarianism to the pervasive horrific treatment of those whose gender presentation and/or sexuality were considered deviant.

Perhaps more interestingly, *Suddenly Last Summer* also conveys the message that self-revelation—confessing one’s secrets and past experiences in front of an audience—is the key to salvation. Just as Williams believed that theatrical audiences could not help but be moved to greater kindness and understanding through encounters with the artist’s true, authentic self, Catherine’s audience (the doctor) decides to save her after listening to her recount the true story of her past experiences. The play also manifests Williams’s

⁷⁴ Ibid. 39.

belief that psychiatry robbed the patient of the ability to express her or his true self, essentially rendering the process by which he believed social change took place impossible. In the play, the psychiatric establishment threatens to deprive Catherine of the truth of her experiences. The “peace” that Mrs. Venable believes would come from a lobotomy would, it is clear, deprive Catherine of her true self, her individuality, her very humanity. (In the film, lobotomized patients are portrayed as a virtual mob of unthinking zombies, a literalization of “the masses.”) At the same time, Dr. Cukrowicz’s truth serum is presented as a threat, suggesting that, despite his professions to the contrary, Williams at times found the prospect of being forced to tell the truth frightening indeed. Given the psychiatric establishment’s concerted attack against homosexuality in postwar America—ranging from attempted conversion to, indeed, forced lobotomies—his conflicted stance toward the institution is not surprising.⁷⁵

Moreover, particularly in the film version, it becomes clear that confession allows one to evade the culture of surveillance. Because it literalizes much of what remained imagined in the play, the film provides an ideal venue for analyzing the complicated politics of performance and surveillance/spectatorship in *Suddenly, Last Summer* (it also added a comma to the play’s title). In doing so, I draw in particular on the work of two earlier scholars: Robert Corber, who has argued that the bedroom setting of Williams’s *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* functions both as a closet (in the sense of hidden sexuality) and a form of resistance against the Cold War surveillance state; and James Gilbert, who more

⁷⁵ It bears mentioning that Williams’s views of psychiatry were somewhat unusual in the postwar United States. Many Americans, and certainly most psychiatrists, saw the practice as one that promoted, rather than repressed, the expression of individual truth. As humanistic psychologist Abraham Maslow put it, “All of the techniques of the therapist are in one way or another truth-revealing, or are ways of strengthening the patient so he can reveal the truth.” Abraham Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1982 [1968]), 60.

recently has argued that the ambiguity in each subsequent version of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* reflects the play's (and film's) central theme of "mendacity" and Williams's contention that adult masculinity was inherently performative.⁷⁶ The film version of *Suddenly, Last Summer* provides an opportunity to offer a new take on these arguments, particularly because the character from whom performance is most demanded, and who is subject to the most surveillance, is a woman.

In the film, the theme of surveillance (as well as its connection to the psychiatric establishment) is established in the opening scene, which shows Dr. Cukrowicz attempting to perform a lobotomy in front of an audience of medical students, who are seated above him in a gallery reminiscent of a theatrical balcony. Small movements and sounds from the audience—a tapping foot, a hushed voice—distract him. Both the observers and the doctor himself seem anxious, and he occasionally pauses to look at his audience nervously. At the end of the operation, he addresses them directly, noting that what they have just witnessed has taken place under the most primitive circumstances imaginable.

The "Drum" also becomes a physical location in the film. Catherine, whose early scenes in this version take place at Lion's View, has two frightening encounters with the Drum. These encounters occur not because Catherine has been deemed violent, although she had indeed been classified as such by the staff at St. Mary's due to false (in their eyes) accusations of rape, but rather as results of Catherine's attempts to escape her fate by whatever means possible.

Catherine's first encounter with the Drum occurs in the wake of a visit from Mrs. Holly and George. As in the play, they are concerned that Mrs. Venable will contest

⁷⁶ Corber, 107-34; Gilbert, 164-88.

Sebastian's will, leaving the family as penurious as they have been since "1929 killed your father and our nest egg." Horrified when her mother and brother encourage her to submit to the lobotomy, Catherine flees her room, looking for the nearest exit. However, the door she chooses leads not to the freedom of the outside world, but rather to the men's ward. The door locks behind her, and she is trapped. It is unclear if this is Lion's View's violent ward or its "regular" ward, but its physical characteristics certainly match Dr. Cukrowicz's description of the Drum. It is a circular room with high ceilings, ringed by an observation deck protected by a short fence. From here, where Catherine finds herself, she looks down at the patients gathered below. However, she does not get to maintain this spectatorial monopoly for long; soon, the men notice the presence of a beautiful young woman and begin staring at her, stomping their feet, and eventually grabbing at her through the ineffective fence. Luckily, a hospital orderly notices in the nick of time that Catherine, already a victim of multiple instances of sexual assault, is locked in, and she is able to escape.

Catherine's second encounter with the Drum is intentional. Following an upsetting visit from her aunt, she goes to the women's ward, which is physically identical to the men's ward. She stares down at the women, who stop what they are doing to return her gaze and begin to laugh. Amid this mounting cacophony, Catherine climbs over the fence and is about to jump when an orderly grabs her and pulls her away.

The beach in Cabeza de Lobo functions as an extension of this culture of surveillance. In the play, the audience can only hear about, but not see, how the events leading up to Sebastian's death unfolded. In the film, Catherine narrates the story as her face is superimposed against flashbacks to this earlier time. The film audience sees, for

instance, Catherine pulled (by Sebastian's hand, although the rest of him remains unseen) across the beach and into the water in her white swimsuit, attempting to cover herself up with her free hand. A fence runs along the beach and into the ocean, dividing Catherine's and Sebastian's paid side from the free side. Like the fences in the men's and women's wards at Lion's View, it is ostensibly protective yet highly permeable, and men on the free side crowd along it to watch Catherine, who appears vulnerable and exposed. Similarly, the restaurant where Catherine and Sebastian eat lunch on the day of his death is separated from the beach by a fence, along which the children gather while banging on their instruments, calling out for bread, and making, according to Catherine, "gobbling noises." Again, the fence separating the observers from observed provided no protection to the latter, as Sebastian met his demise shortly thereafter.

But if Sebastian cannot hide from the children, he successfully remains hidden from the audience, as he is unseen even in flashbacks. His absence in the play, which unfolds in the present, is unremarkable, but in the film it is clearly intentional. Hopes of catching a glimpse of his face are continually denied, as audience members see only his hand as he pulls Catherine across the beach; a tall, dark-haired, elegantly-suited man sitting across from his cousin at the restaurant and running away from his pursuers through the streets; and, most ominously, a single hand reaching out from below his pile of attackers. Sebastian is no heroic character, and his death makes it difficult to cast his unseen-ness as a triumphant thwarting of the violations inherent in the panoptic or spectatorial gaze, rather implying that he was a victim of a culture that refused to allow for the possibility of expressing his authentic self.

Williams himself, moreover, was also not always the most astute critic of his own work. For all of his focus on authenticity and confession, much of his work, including *Suddenly Last Summer*, contains an unresolved struggle between the desire to confess and the knowledge that to do so is dangerous, even life-threatening. It is easy to imagine, for instance, that what appealed to Williams about Method acting was its intense focus on self-revelation—precisely what he wanted to, but could not, do. Sebastian’s unseen-ness therefore functions as a manifestation of Williams’s own feelings about living as a gay man in the repressive climate of Cold War America. At the same time, Sebastian’s story drew on cultural tropes that would have been recognizable to many members of the audience. As Georges-Claude Guilbert has pointed out, Sebastian was a stand-in for *Saint* Sebastian, the gay martyr portrayed in Renaissance paintings with a naked torso pierced through with arrows.⁷⁷ Williams implied without having to show the fate that awaited people who revealed their authentic, but by the standards of society unacceptable, selves.

Given that observation and surveillance—from the watchfulness of the devouring birds and the panoptic Drum to the unwanted attention Catherine receives in her white swimsuit and the unseen Sebastian—are cast in such a negative light, it is all the more surprising that confession—voluntary exposure—would be what saves Catherine in the end. In addition to convincing the doctor not to force her to undergo a lobotomy, in the film Catherine’s speech seems to bring her peace. While in the play she runs off into the garden before the doctor’s verdict, the film ends with the two of them hand in hand,

⁷⁷ Georges-Claude Guilbert, “Queering and Dequeering the Text: Tennessee Williams’s *A Streetcar Named Desire*,” *Cercles* 10 (2004): 89. On Sebastian and homophobia, see also Wayne Koestenbaum, *Cleavage: Essays on Sex, Stars, and Aesthetics* (New York: Ballantine, 2000), 117; D.A. Miller, “Visual Pleasure in 1959,” in *Out Takes: Essays on Queer Theory and Film*, ed. Ellis Hanson (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 99.

walking calmly into the house. Williams, it seems, distinguished between enforced, coercive surveillance and voluntary self-revelation. In this way, my analysis adds to those of both Robert Corber and James Gilbert, suggesting that, to the playwright, being watched was not always an analogue for the Cold War culture of surveillance, and performance was not always the same as “mendacity.” Rather, for Williams, these concepts at times functioned as key aspects of a political-aesthetic theory that attempted to explain how social change took place.

Williams’s work thus both drew on and challenged the Cold War discourse of authenticity, revealing the ways in which these ideas traveled through the 1950s to inform the social movements of the 1960s. The work of Betty Friedan and Method actress and teacher Stella Adler, which I discuss in the next chapter, functioned in much the same way. Both Adler and Friedan attempted to write women into the culture of authenticity. In doing so, however, they recreated some of its most sexist tendencies, particularly the idea that the reality of women’s lives needed to be transcended or escaped if authenticity were to be attained. Their liberal feminism was thus deeply informed by the association of women with an inauthentic mass.

Chapter Three: “Everyday Reality Is Not Enough for the Actor”: Stella Adler, Liberal Feminism, and the Politics of Aesthetic Self-Reliance

“Now this is what happens here... You come from a very busy world. You didn’t have your coffee, or you grabbed it at the cafeteria, if the baby is home crying, or your husband doesn’t love you, or the boyfriend didn’t call you, and you’ve got mail to answer—everybody has troubles... You’ve got to understand that these four-and-a-half hours and this is the principle, you leave the outside world, why, because for this you need all of yourself here. You don’t need your father, you don’t need your mother, you don’t need your husband, and you don’t need your child, and you don’t need the papers, and you don’t care what happens in the New York Times. You need 100% selfishness, honorable selfishness toward you.” —Stella Adler, Technique I, undated¹

Historians have long been familiar with “the problem that has no name” identified by Betty Friedan in 1963. Trapped in suburban domesticity, the author argued, middle-class American women felt unfulfilled, broken, and cut off from anything real or authentic. They had learned to think about themselves solely in relation to their husbands and children, in the process giving up any sort of individual identity they may once have had. Their lives were consumed by the banal daily rituals that taking care of others demanded, leaving little time to take care of, think about, or express their true selves. The only way to escape from this “feminine mystique,” as Friedan so famously termed it, was to reclaim and express one’s own identity through a fulfilling vocation.²

In this chapter, I will explore a less-familiar realm in which “the problem that has no name” was addressed and challenged: the cultural realm, more specifically the work of actress and teacher Stella Adler. Famous for her work in New York City’s Yiddish

¹ Stella Adler, Technique I, undated, folder 19.8, Stella Adler and Harold Clurman Papers, Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin [hereafter “Stella Adler Papers”].

² Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1963).

theatre in the early twentieth century and the left-wing Group Theatre in the 1930s, Adler's most enduring legacy was and remains her teaching. From the founding of her studio in 1949 to her death in 1992, she influenced several generations of actors and actresses. Through a careful examination of her papers, I have discovered that the techniques Adler developed to produce good acting paralleled to a stunning degree the steps Friedan recommended to escape the problem that has no name.

Both Adler and Friedan attempted to write women into the culture of authenticity. As early as the 1930s, Adler had objected to the version of Method acting developed by Lee Strasberg and discussed in chapter one, particularly the technique of affective memory. Reliving traumatic experiences, Adler believed, was not only ineffective, but also dangerous for the performer. In her own work, she emphasized action over emotion, taking control of the creative process over losing control of one's feelings. Both women, however, also perpetuated the aspect of mass culture discourse that figured women's daily lives as something that needed to be escaped and transcended. In this way, they were actually quite similar to the male Beat writers, discussed in the next chapter, who insisted that women could only be artists if they rejected the world of child-rearing; unfulfilling, uncreative wage work; and domestic responsibilities in favor of the more "authentic" experiences that could be found on the road.

This chapter does three things. First, I lay out Stella Adler's version of the problem that has no name. She argued that the dehumanizing nature of modern U.S. culture, which took away people's ability to think for and express themselves truthfully, made it difficult for young men and women alike to become great actors and actresses. Women, however, faced additional obstacles to creating great art because they were

trapped by the repressive conformity of suburban domesticity. Only when they left behind the world of domestic and familial obligations could they become true individuals and, in the process, great actresses.

Second, I explore the solutions Adler offered. She developed techniques aimed at getting students to break free from the conventional behaviors they had been taught, reclaiming their “true selves” in the process. They were to think of themselves as autonomous individuals whose actions and identities were not determined by their relationships to anyone else. Her emphasis on authenticity, independence, and action encouraged students to discover who they really were, express themselves truthfully, and take control of their own lives in order to find self-fulfillment. Taken together, these elements paralleled the importance Betty Friedan put on self-actualization.

Finally, I draw on the boxes full of letters from Adler’s students in the 1960s and 1970s to explore the effects of her teaching.³ Both male and female students wrote that, before they began taking classes with Stella Adler, they had felt phony, out of place, and unfulfilled. For the first time, they wrote, they knew how to express their true selves. Added to this, female letter writers wrote that acting provided an escape from, and an antidote to, the intensely other-centered nature of their lives as wives and mothers. Friedan argued that any fulfilling vocation was the solution to the problem that has no name, but Adler’s female students were particularly drawn to the inherently self-expressive nature of acting, which allowed them to bring to the surface what had previously been buried deep inside.

Neither Friedan nor Adler, of course, invented the ideas of action, authenticity, or self-actualization; indeed, part of the work of this project is to show the widespread

³ Unfortunately, letters from before the late 1960s are not extant.

distribution of such ideas in postwar culture. Friedan in particular drew on the tradition of humanistic psychology, which, as articulated by people like Abraham Maslow, associated self-actualization with the expression of the authentic self and informed to a large degree how postwar Americans conceived of the relationship between themselves and the world. As Joanne Meyerowitz has argued, the similarities between Friedan's ideas and the phenomenally widespread understanding of humanistic psychology helps to explain the popularity of *The Feminine Mystique* upon its 1963 publication. Friedan, Meyerowitz argues, "drew on mass culture as much as she countered it. The success of her book stemmed in part from her compelling elaboration of familiar themes."⁴

Adler's teachings, I argue, should be understood in a similar way. Part of the reason her techniques resonated so powerfully with her students, that is, was the extent to which they drew on these same ideas of humanistic psychology. They allowed women students to see the relevance to their own lives of ideas that were already being broadly disseminated around them. At times, the influence of these broader cultural ideas led to interesting "misreadings" of Adler's teachings. While Adler herself, for example, denied the importance of emotion, her students did not, filling their letters with joy not only over the greater control they felt over their lives, but of the greater emotional authenticity they experienced as a result of Adler's classes. They read onto their teacher ideas that she did not endorse—but that *did* characterize the broader culture. More than passive recipients of ideas, Adler's students played an active role in determining the meaning of her techniques.

⁴ Joanne Meyerowitz, "Beyond *The Feminine Mystique*: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946-1958," in Meyerowitz, ed., *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 232. Also see Daniel Horowitz, *Betty Friedan and the Making of The Feminine Mystique: The American Left, the Cold War, and Modern Feminism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998).

The remarkable similarities between Adler and Friedan contribute to our understanding of the history of gender and feminism in several ways. As many scholars have pointed out, the period in which Adler opened her studio, the immediate post-World War Two era, was particularly unfriendly to critiques of the gender status quo. In the late 1940s and 1950s, anti-communism pushed an emerging Popular Front feminism underground, where it would remain until the 1960s. In particular, Cold War fears posited women's domesticity and dependence as a bulwark against communism. Adler's studio would thus have been one of the relatively hidden places that encouraged women to develop an independent sense of self and cultivated a feminist consciousness. It was thus an important channel through which the postwar obsession with authenticity traveled to inform the more explicit feminism of the 1960s and 1970s and to create a more broadly receptive audience for that feminism.⁵

⁵ Feminism, of course, was very much alive in the years between the ratification of the 19th Amendment in 1920 and the emergence of second-wave feminism. Although suffragists split over the Equal Rights Amendment, both supporters and detractors continued their activism. So, too, did Progressive and pacifist women, despite concerted attacks in the wake of World War One. In the 1930s, the New Deal put several decades of Progressive activism into practice, and many of the women behind these initiatives were able to secure secondary leadership positions within its administration. In the 1930s and 1940s, such Communist women as Claudia Jones, Mary Inman, and Betty Millard pushed the Party to consider the "woman question." Although McCarthyism pushed Popular Front feminism underground in the 1940s and 1950s, women continued their activism through other movements, especially the civil rights and labor movements. These movements in turn greatly influenced 1960s feminism. On the continuation of women's activism in the 1920s, see Nancy Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform, 1890-1935* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991). On women in the New Deal administration, see Susan Ware, *Beyond Suffrage: Women in the New Deal* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981); Linda Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994). On Popular Front feminism and its suppression, see Horowitz; Landon Storrs, "Red Scare Politics and the Suppression of Popular Front Feminism: The Loyalty Investigation of Mary Dublin Keyserling," *Journal of American History* 90, no. 2 (2003): 491-524; Kate Weigand, *Red Feminism: American Communism and the Making of Women's Liberation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001). On women in the civil rights and labor movements, see Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Dayo F. Gore, *Radicalism at the Crossroads: African American Women Activists in the Cold War* (New York: New York University Press, 2011); Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

Notably, both Adler and Friedan had been a part of the Popular Front culture of the 1930s and 1940s, Adler as a member of the Group Theatre and Friedan as a journalist with the Federated Press and the United Electrical Radio and Machine Workers. Of the two, Adler was the less explicitly political. For example, she studiously avoided the debate, which ripped through the Group Theatre especially in 1933-1934, over membership in the Communist Party. Later, she would blame the party for much of the divisiveness in the organization. At the same time, however, she enrolled in party-sponsored classes on Marxism.⁶ Even in the early 1960s, her teaching would occasionally digress into a critique of the dehumanizing effects of capitalism.⁷

No one familiar with the history of the House Un-American Activities Committee's targeting of artists could claim that the cultural realm was depoliticized in the 1950s. Nonetheless, it does seem to have provided Adler with a modicum of protection—a safe space in which her critiques of gender relations could be voiced without being considered subversive. As historians have argued in the past two decades, Popular Front activists, most famously Friedan herself, found ways of keeping their feminist commitments alive during the 1950s, providing links between the Left feminism of the 1930s and 1940s and the second wave of the 1960s and 1970s.⁸ I argue that we should see Stella Adler's work as part of this tradition—as one more pocket of resistance that would be drawn on by the next generation of self-identified feminists.

⁶ On Friedan, see Horowitz. On Adler, the Group Theatre, and the Communist Party, see Wendy Smith, *Real Life Drama: The Group Theatre and America, 1931-40* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), especially 157-59.

⁷ Script Analysis Class, February 27, 1961, folder 3.11, Stella Adler Papers.

⁸ In addition to Horowitz, good examples of this trend include Cobble; Storrs; and Amy Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace: Traditional Motherhood and Radical Politics in the 1960s* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993).

Finally, my work also points to new answers about how a political consciousness is nurtured and disseminated. The women who wrote to Stella Adler learned to take control over their own lives, to think of themselves as individuals whose identities were not determined by marriage and family, and to pursue a fulfilling vocation that emanated from deep inside them not by reading *The Feminine Mystique*, joining the National Organization for Women, or attending a consciousness-raising session. Rather, they learned these lessons through their participation in cultural production.

The ways in which Adler and her female students formulated, expressed, and dealt with their discontent, however, also revealed the limits of what a liberal feminist discourse could accomplish. Unlike, for example, Tennessee Williams, for whom authentic self-expression was a necessary first step in effecting social and political change, their exclusive focus on individual self-expression, self-actualization, and self-fulfillment neither demanded nor implied engagement with the world at large: their goal was to change the self, not change society. In this way it was not merely apolitical, but conservative. Women's frustrations were recognized, but ultimately tamped down with reassurances that the only thing that needed to change was the individual.

**“To Play in the Big Plays Which Are Not—You Know, ‘Mama, I’m Hungry’”:
Great Art, Gender, and U.S. Culture**

Asked around 1950 whether her most famous disciple, Marlon Brando, should be considered a great actor, Stella Adler expressed doubt. Although confident that he had the potential for greatness, she did not feel that his role choices to date revealed his capabilities. The world would never know if he was great unless he played the “great parts.” These great parts most definitely did not include material concerns such as a

child's hunger or familial entanglements involving "mama, papa, the children." "That," Adler declared definitively, "is not acting." These domestic dramas lacked the "bigness" of a character like King Lear, whose epic story documents the "problems the modern man has."⁹

This interview reveals several persistent themes in Adler's aesthetic philosophy, all of which beg for gender analysis. At the most basic level, as generations of actresses have lamented, there are few King Lears for women. It is also telling that Adler singled out as "not acting" those domestic and familial concerns that made up the bulk of so many women's lives, thus perpetuating one of the ways in which authenticity was gendered male. As the following section will make clear, Adler believed not only that these "trivial" concerns had no place on the stage, but also that making them the center of one's real life stunted artistic growth. In this way, her views were in line with those of male Beat writers who insisted that women's domestic lives could never provide the basis for great art.

According to Stella Adler, the nature of postwar American culture made it difficult for young men and women alike to become great artists. She perceived the climate as one of antiseptic conformity, and most young Americans as broken and repressed. They were unable, she believed, to access their true selves and express their true emotional range.

The American experience, Adler argued, was purged of all genuine emotional and sensory experiences. While she was particularly concerned with the post-World War Two climate, she believed that these tendencies had a longer history. All Americans, she believed, shared the austerity and self-protectiveness portrayed in Grant Wood's iconic

⁹ Technique I, 1950, folder 20.1, Stella Adler Papers.

American Gothic. Even eating had been reduced to a dull ritual of ingesting prefabricated approximations of more authentic cuisine. According to Adler, a lack of familiarity with these most basic of experiences in real life made it virtually impossible to become a great artist.¹⁰

The result of this sterility was a discrepancy between inner and outer selves. Although both women and men were affected by this “broken society,” they expressed these effects in very different ways. Broken women were “scarecrows” who beneath their costumes of makeup and fashion were only “skel[e]ton, death.”¹¹ The quintessential broken man, by contrast, was an animal. As she put it in her description of the Beat generation, “He’s wild. He howls.”¹² Even as she criticized this broken man, however, her own beliefs bore many similarities to those expressed by the Beat generation, as the next chapter will show.

Adler attributed these problems largely to technological development, including mass production and the onset of the atomic age. She believed that technology was taking away Americans’ individuality and humanity. For example, she argued that Ford Motor Company’s promise that its workers be able to afford its products led to a classlessness that bespoke not American virtue but rather a repressive conformity.¹³ She saw impersonal, non-creative assembly line work as turning workers into automatons both in the workplace and in their homes, which they filled with identical items.

¹⁰ Seventh Class, Breakdown Class, 1959, folder 3.9, Stella Adler Papers.

¹¹ Seventh Class, Breakdown Class, 1959, folder 3.9, Stella Adler Papers.

¹² Characterization Class, fall 1958, folder 1.9, Stella Adler Papers. Adler likely intended this as a reference to Allen Ginsberg’s poetry collection *Howl*, which had been published two years earlier.

¹³ Seventh Class, Breakdown Class, 1959, folder 3.9, Stella Adler Papers.

Adler's equation of classlessness and conformity is surprising, but it was certainly not idiosyncratic. Many postwar commentators argued that, contra the coerced equality of the Soviet Union, the United States was a truly classless society with no impediments to social mobility. This school of thought, however, cast classlessness as a great virtue. Adler's views seem closer to those of the individuals who feared that sameness, epitomized by the supposedly brainwashed automatons of postwar suburbia, was robbing Americans of their ability to think for themselves and thus leaving them susceptible to totalitarianism. That is, her beliefs harkened not only to such thinkers as Herbert Marcuse, but also forward to the young radicals in Students for a Democratic Society.

In addition to the dangers of mass production, Adler attributed the problems of modern American society to the perceived hybridization of humans and machines, an early form of the fears that Donna Haraway would later take on in her "Cyborg Manifesto."¹⁴ Adler was troubled by the fact that people's identities were no longer separable from the technology that they used; indeed, she believed it had reached the point that "man is forgotten." Using the example of a man riding in an automobile, she bemoaned the fact that "man" was no longer an autonomous individual who could be defined solely by his own independent existence. As she put it, "its [*sic*] not he's a man and that's [*sic*] an automobile—it goes together."¹⁵ It was not that Adler resented the ability of workers to enter the middle class, or that she would have prescribed economic inequality as an antidote to conformity. Quite the contrary. It was, rather, the fact that people's identities had come to hinge so completely on what they purchased, coupled

¹⁴ Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 149-82. The piece was originally published in the *Socialist Review* in 1985.

¹⁵ Characterization Class, fall 1958, folder 1.9, Stella Adler Papers.

with the standardization of these products and the dehumanization of the people who produced them, that Adler identified as the source of this perceived conformity.

Of course, no technology was more terrifying to postwar Americans than atomic weaponry, another development that Adler feared was robbing people of their humanity—and, concomitantly, of their ability to be great artists. She contrasted her own pastoral childhood (although she was born and raised in New York City) with the current age, in which fear of annihilation deprived people of experiences that taught them how to be human, for example, the manual, non-technological labor of berry picking. After the launch of the Sputnik satellite in the fall of 1957, which seemed to provide further proof that the values of the past were being replaced, she went so far as to ask her students if they were indeed still human.¹⁶

Although Adler believed that the conditions of modern American life made it difficult for both men and women to become great artists, there was no doubt in her mind that women faced additional obstacles. In part, this was because they did not know how to use their bodies. Americans in general were “held in,” “in jail,” and “locked up.” Adler told her students that ninety percent of their lives were spent “locked up in this prison.” She attributed this to “the Puritan tradition” in American culture, a tradition which she believed affected women more than men. American women went through their lives “protecting themselves...they’re ashamed or protecting themselves. She

¹⁶ Technique I, undated, folder 19.8, Stella Adler Papers. Transcripts of this class refer both to Sputnik and the fact that there had never been a Catholic president, likely dating it sometime between the fall of 1957 and John F. Kennedy’s election in November, 1960.

encouraged her students to break free from “all this contradiction, all this shame, all this pulling in” through attention to voice and body work.¹⁷

Far and away, though, the biggest impediment that women faced was the narrowness Adler perceived in their daily lives. She saw the domestic and familial concerns for which women were primarily responsible as trivial, mundane, and ultimately antithetical to authentic cultural production. In order to be a great artist—which, moreover, Adler offered as the key to personal fulfillment in real life—one had to eschew what she saw as the stultifying conformity of suburban, domestic American life. Although she often insisted that great acting had to come out of experience, she ultimately conceived of women’s daily lives more as impediments to the artistic process than as resources on which to draw. She divided the world into two competing, irreconcilable poles: the repressive world of material concerns and interpersonal obligations, where one merely existed, and the more fulfilling, ultimately more *real* world of the theatre, where one could truly live. Moreover, while navigating between these two worlds was certainly an inconvenience for men, it was a matter of life or death, sometimes literally, for women.

Adler demanded that male and female students alike leave their daily lives behind when they entered her classroom or the theatre. It did not matter if “you didn’t have your coffee, or you grabbed it at the cafeteria, if the baby is home crying, or your husband doesn’t love you, or the boyfriend didn’t call you, and you’ve got mail to answer.” Mentally, students were to build an impermeable wall between these concerns and their artistic work. Focusing on personal relationships, economic woes, or world events would only stymie their development. She insisted that “you don’t need your father, you don’t

¹⁷ Technique I, undated, folder 19.8, Stella Adler Papers. Likely 1957-1960.

need your mother, you don't need your husband, and you don't need your child, and you don't need the money, and you don't need the papers, and you don't care what happens in the *New York Times*." This was crucial not only for success in the demanding world of the theatre but also for the artist her- or himself. "I want you to understand," Adler instructed her students, "that this is good for you, very good for you to know that one area in your life is controlled." Exercising control over one aspect of their lives would make it easier to deal with the lack of control they experienced in others.¹⁸

A careful parsing of Adler's teaching materials, however, reveals that the way she conceived of the relationship between life and art was deeply gendered. Transcripts of her breakdown (in which each beat of a scene was carefully limned to determine the character's action) and script analysis classes, which often involved long monologues describing a scene from an existing play, an imaginative exercise, or a painting or photograph, are particularly revealing. In the section that follows, I will focus on three examples: her 1961 analysis of a series of photographs included in *Life* magazine under the title "Make-Believe Mothers"; her 1958 explication of a scene from Clifford Odets' play *Waiting for Lefty*; and her description that same year of the "spine," or overarching narrative, of her own life. I argue that she conceptualized acting as an escape from—and a solution to—the "mundanity" that many women experienced in their own lives. At the same time, her understanding of women's lives often obscured their unpaid domestic labor. Adler also developed a theory that put "feminine" qualities and "artistic" qualities at odds with each other. She both recognized, but ultimately refused to seek structural solutions to, the gendered division of domestic labor, the difficulties of balancing paid

¹⁸ Technique I, 1950, folder 20.1, Stella Adler Papers.

and unpaid work, and the dissatisfaction and lack of fulfillment many of her female students felt in their lives.

First, Adler advanced the idea that most women's lives were characterized by the stultifying conformity of suburban domesticity. Her analysis of the "Make-Believe Mothers" series bore much in common with a related critique of postwar suburbia: the fear that the "conformity" of "mass culture" created a hotbed for incipient totalitarianism. While the ostensible topic of her analysis was a series of photographs of children dressed up as adults, her deeper subjects were the deadening nature of suburbia and the women who lived there.

The children in these pictures, Adler argued, were "monsters." Like their parents, who cared only "to drink and have fun," these children of "middle-class leisure" existed only "on a[n] appetite level...a[n] amusement level." Neither parents nor children had any exposure to or interest in cultural life. Instead, the adults filled their days with empty consumption and passive entertainment. They were more interested in "look[ing] at clothes" than contemplating "the world of ideas." Moreover, they did not contribute anything valuable to the world; rather, "they're consumers. They use things...Bottles that could be opened, cans that could be opened. Appetite without work." Sundays were spent "watching TV...Ed Sullivan." To Adler, these examples were proof of the bankruptcy of "middlebrow" culture.¹⁹

Like many postwar critics of mass culture, Adler placed much of the blame for this bankruptcy at the feet of women. American women, she argued, were "people without a center," people who purchased and "put on" identities with no truth behind them. Women, that is, more easily slid into inauthenticity than did men. Often, Adler

¹⁹ Script Analysis Class, February 27, 1961, folder 3.11, Stella Adler Papers.

continued, this centerlessness manifested itself as garishness, which she claimed to have seen all around her at John F. Kennedy's recent presidential inauguration. "I went to the inauguration," she told students, "and you see that...American women do not know themselves. They put things on the outside and it hangs on them." They were interested merely in "dressing up and putting on and smoking and drinking and having fun." They wore dresses that were too tight and earrings that were too large. Adler proclaimed these women "monsters."²⁰

She imagined their daily lives to be filled with idle gossip and the consumption of both goods and culture. One of their defining characteristics was that "they buy." They were "women who all day long is [*sic*] busy with TV and she goes and shops at the A & P and she reads magazine stories." Lacking "centers" of their own, "the husband might be the center" of their lives. Children were merely accessories. These women were likely to fill their days with "go[ing] to the hairdresser" or socializing in their own or neighbors' homes. Their topics of conversation ranged from the drinking problems of their neighbors to information gleaned from *Time* magazine to the love lives of stars like Eddie Fisher. Adler insisted that "they don't work very much, this group." It was ultimately "a world that deals with material things. With things and not too much with ideas."²¹

This analysis, however, marked a rare moment in which Adler blamed not those who lived in suburbia, but rather the culture of which they were a part. As quickly as she deemed the children of this class "monsters," for example, she cautioned her students not to judge them but to understand how they were products of their surroundings. She similarly cautioned students not to judge or criticize the women who populated this

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

world. In order to play these characters successfully, performers needed to feel compassion for them, identify with them, and even love them. While in part this was a reflection of Adler's philosophy of truthful acting, it may also have been a result of the subtle critique of capitalism that occasionally emerged in her teaching. When people were given too much, she argued, "you create in them a kind of vapid quality." In this view, it was consumer culture itself that was to blame.

Even if people were not to blame for their exclusive focus on material goods, however, it was still a world Stella Adler rejected. She further developed these ideas in her analysis of Clifford Odets' *Waiting for Lefty*. First performed in 1935, Odets' most famous play is made up of a series of vignettes portraying the various ways the Great Depression affected people's lives. Much of the action of the play, including a series of scenes featuring the young married couple Joe and Edna, centers on a proposed New York City taxi drivers' strike. Over the course of the play, economic woes drive Joe and Edna to resent and betray each other. In her analysis of their relationship, Adler focused on the differences between the two characters in a way that equated male qualities with artistic qualities and female qualities with practical qualities. She clearly valued the former over the latter.

According to Adler, Joe epitomized the artistic temperament. She saw him as a "dreamer," a person who "goes into a world of his own" and "is not rooted to the reality." In order to make reality palatable, someone like Joe would have to "embroider" it, raising everyday life to the level of a life-or-death struggle or a magical event. "Like a child," she told students, "he sees a broom and it becomes a horse." He often made fanciful promises that he could not possibly keep. Similarly, material concerns such as money

were of no interest to people like Joe, who were apt to spend it on frivolous purchases or lose it in careless ways. Indeed, “all facts that are disagreeable to him he is not responsible for.” He was also likely to lash out at anyone who criticized his carelessness. To do so was to insult him “in his soul.” All of this, Adler argued, came “from the basic character element of needing a bigger world.” For Stella Adler, the artistic temperament was best characterized by a refusal to accept current reality.²²

In contrast, Adler characterized Edna as someone solely motivated by material concerns. Odets’ intention, Adler theorized, was to use the character of Edna to show that “a woman cannot go on with the social situation which is depriving her children of milk.” She is practical, realistic, and “faces the facts...the brutal facts.” Whereas Joe was imaginative, Edna was “functional.” Whereas Joe’s “real life” was rooted in his imagination, Edna’s was rooted in their belongings. When the character of Edna is first introduced, for example, the couple’s furniture has just been repossessed. Adler argued in her analysis of the play that in taking away the furniture, Odets “takes away the girl’s life. The furniture is life. The realities is [*sic*] life.” Unlike Joe, Edna did not care about a “bigger world”—only about the material concerns of everyday life. To Adler, Edna’s struggle for brute survival was less compelling than Joe’s idealism.²³

In Adler’s mind, Joe’s orientation was superior to Edna’s because it represented the choice of the artistic life, which refused to accept convention, over one rooted in material banality. True artists, she argued, did not care for material things. Rather, “what

²² Characterization Class, Reel #8, Class #12, fall 1958, folder 1.9, Stella Adler Papers. Adler’s uses of “reality” and “the real” were fluid, at times used as synonyms for authentic and at times as its opposite—the perceived repressive conformity of suburban domesticity. To avoid confusion, in my own analysis I have tried to restrict “real” to this first definition and instead use “daily” or “conventional” to denote people’s lives outside of the theatre.

²³ *Ibid.*

he wants you cant [*sic*] touch. But that is a greater happiness than what you can touch.” Artists were privileged precisely because their fulfillment fell outside of the bounds of everyday reality. Edna with her practicality could not understand this, and that is why she and Joe fought. To Adler, the struggle between idealistic masculinity and practical femininity was the perfect analogy for the struggle between the superior artistic life and the inferior conventional life.²⁴

Adler’s gendered analysis of *Waiting for Lefty* was not an isolated incident but rather an integral part of her philosophy. The tug-of-war between artistic, impractical men and down-to-earth, practical women was a theme she returned to again and again. Take her description of Eugene O’Neill’s play *Beyond the Horizon*, for example: the dreamer “is a creative man who only lives in his imagination. And a man who lives in his imagination doesnt [*sic*] live very good with a woman.” According to Adler, the only option for a woman involved with this kind of man was to “let the dreamer dream. Give him his dreams.”²⁵

Adler’s analysis of the relationship between the artistic and the practical in her own life was complex and at times contradictory. She included a description of her then-husband, the director Harold Clurman, as an example of the “creative man” who “doesnt [*sic*] live very good with a woman” and was “helpless” in the world of material concerns.²⁶ At other times, though, she identified herself as the impractical one in their relationship, claiming that “he [Clurman] is a thousand times more practical than I am and thats [*sic*] why he puts up with me. She described herself as a person whose instinct

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Characterization Class, October 23, 1958, folder 1.9, Stella Adler Papers.

²⁶ Ibid.

was to “recede from the practical...I know...that if you hand me a practical thing I say, Oh I dont [*sic*] want to see the bills now, put them in the corner.”²⁷

Despite the ambivalence with which Adler described her own relationship, one thing was perfectly clear: she thought about herself as someone who had escaped from the banality of suburban domesticity into the exciting, more fulfilling world of the theatre. She had done what she believed most women were never able to do because they were too mired in domestic and familial obligations. Indeed, this was such a crucial part of how she thought about herself that she identified this struggle as the main spine, or narrative, of her life. Despite her desire to be a wife and mother, she eventually realized that denying herself the ability to “live her theatrical life” was not only being untrue to herself, but also was making her ill.

Adler described herself as someone who, from the beginning, had felt out of place in “normal” society. “There is a little girl,” she told students, “who lived at home and played with children and she tried to do what the other children did but she did not terribly much fit in.” Her action—the goal toward which an actress playing this part would work—was “to try to fit in. To belong, to try to be a part of.” Adler attributed her outsider status to her theatrical family, which made her feel different and foreign. Accordingly, it was only in the theatre, where she began at a young age, that she felt at home.²⁸

Much of the rest of her life was a struggle between the sense of belonging she felt in the theatre and the desire to belong in “normal” life. As an adolescent, these twin desires led her to run away in an attempt to escape conformity, only to return because she

²⁷ Characterization Class, fall 1958, folder 1.9, Stella Adler Papers.

²⁸ Characterization Class, Reel #9, Class #13, fall 1958, folder 1.9, Stella Adler Papers.

wanted so desperately to fit in. As Adler put it to her students, “she liked to live at home but she felt she had to conform.” She wanted both “to fit into the average society” and to transcend it.²⁹

Later, as a young wife and mother, she tried to find contentment in her new life in White Plains, New York, a suburb of New York City. Motherhood did bring her joy, but it did not quell her suspicion that her “real life” was elsewhere. Living away from the city and in the company of “average people,” she began “to feel lonesome again.” She began “to think of acting again” and planned to return to the world of theatre.³⁰ For a time she hoped that she could combine her family life with her artistic life.

Her attempt to “live in both worlds,” however, presented new problems. As she began spending more and more time with her acting company, her husband grew bored and frustrated with her absence. She, too, struggled. Although “she likes her baby and she likes her home and she wants to be there,” she found that “the vocabulary of the actors is closer to her.” She felt herself “being pulled apart.” She and her husband fought frequently, and both struck up extramarital dalliances. Eventually, their attempts to patch up their marriage failed, and they divorced.³¹

With her marriage over, she tried to return to acting full-time but instead found herself hospitalized after having a breakdown. Being in the hospital was, as Adler put it, “a little like living in White Plains,” a none-too-subtle dig at the sterility of suburban life. When she recovered enough to leave the hospital, she remarried and for a time was able

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid. In reality, Adler met Englishman Horace Eleascheff while still a teenager (she was performing in a play in London around 1920). He was the father of her only child, Ellen. When their marriage broke up a few years later, Ellen often accompanied Adler while she worked (much to the chagrin of other Group Theatre members, especially Clifford Odets).

to balance the two sides of her life. She found, however, that this was merely a temporary respite. Soon, the sickness returned, and she was forced once more to retire from her professional life.³²

Of course, Adler *did* eventually recover, and she certainly continued working in the theatre, even if she never fully found a way to balance her home life and her theatrical life. The meaning of the struggle, however, stayed with her for decades. Being in the theatre was “living,” but being in the outside world was merely “existing.” This was equally true of all artists. “If Mr. Toscanini’s³³ thing is taken away,” she asked students, “and he lives in Riverdale without performing is he living his life? What is he doing? He’s existing.” Similarly, while others in her life “wanted to steer her to Scarsdale...she wanted to have that and the theatre. She had to have the theatre and when she left she had no life, she existed.” Adler determined, therefore, that the main action of her life was “to live her theatrical life.” Indeed, this was the only way she would be truly living.³⁴

Years later, Adler told a condensed version of this story with a humorous twist. Despite the lighter tone, the pain she felt at not belonging and later being torn between two worlds is apparent. This version of the story also highlights the gendered nature of this struggle. As a child, she was “not like the rest of the girls.” This continued into adulthood; only around other theatre people did she feel that she truly belonged. She married, and although her husband was kind, his parents did not recognize her unconventional nature; rather, “they expect her to mend the socks.” When her mother-in-

³² Ibid.

³³ Arturo Toscanini, the renowned Italian conductor.

³⁴ Characterization Class, fall 1958, folder 1.9, Stella Adler Papers.

law³⁵ came to visit, “she arrived with a mountain of socks. And she said, won’t you mend them, dear. I was already in the Avante-Gard [*sic*] theatre.” Although this version of the story seems to have been told for laughs at the expense of Adler’s provincial mother-in-law, it also emphasizes Adler’s belief that the theatrical life was both the opposite of and the antidote to domestic banality.³⁶

Whether or not this narrative was factually accurate does not entirely matter, although it certainly bears some striking resemblances to Adler’s own life. What is important is the narrative itself. Adler conceived of her life as a struggle between suffocating conformity and exhilarating individuality, between the living death of suburbia and the exciting world of the theatre, between, more prosaically, domestic life and creative labor. The gendered aspects of this perspective are difficult to ignore, as are its similarities to the discourse of liberal feminism that was developing simultaneously.

“I’m Not a Mama”: Stella Adler, Betty Friedan, and the Pursuit of Autonomy

As historian Daniel Horowitz has noted, the problems identified and the solutions proposed by Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique* reflected decades of experience with Popular Front activism, psychological theory, and outsider status. They also developed along a path strikingly similar to the theories developed and espoused by Stella Adler. Both saw women trapped by the repressive conformity of suburbia, which turned them from individuals into mindless, not fully human automatons. Both argued that a fulfilling vocation was the solution to this problem. At a deeper level, both emphasized the importance of reclaiming a self that was active, independent, and

³⁵ A reference to Eleascheff’s mother.

³⁶ Script Analysis Class, February 24, 1961, folder 3.11, Stella Adler Papers.

authentic. They encouraged their readers and students to break free from the conventions foisted on them by society in order to find their true voices. Finally, both Adler and the Friedan of *The Feminist Mystique* tended to substitute individual growth and self-fulfillment for structural change.

Like Stella Adler, Betty Friedan argued in 1963 that Americans were not fully human because they lacked a core identity, a stable sense of self. They played with identity, putting it on and taking it off, but never expressed what was truly inside them. These qualities, she argued, had even begun to emerge in children and adolescents of both sexes. These young people had a “sleepwalking,” “playing-a-part quality.” They never seemed to “feel alive or real.” Friedan described one young girl as “not quite awake, like a puppet with someone else pulling the strings.” Commentators of all stripes were beginning to express the fear that American children were “not growing up ‘real.’” They had ceased to think for themselves and to express what was inside them, which made them less than human.³⁷

This concern with a discrepancy between inner and outer selves linked both Adler and Friedan, the latter explicitly, to postwar commentators such as David Riesman. As Friedan put it, a handful of critics and mental health professionals, Riesman among them, “saw that the human personality, recognizable by a strong and stable core of self, was being replaced by a vague, amorphous, other-directed personality.”³⁸ While Riesman attributed these developments largely to the changing nature of work, both Adler and Friedan blamed this problem on the narrow, circumscribed nature of women’s lives, which did not allow them to express their full humanity. Because the feminine mystique

³⁷ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1963), 282-83.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 283-84.

made it impossible for women to develop a strong sense of self, they were incapable of inculcating in their children a fully-developed human identity.

Stella Adler never wavered in her belief that suburban domesticity meant figurative death for women. In her assertion that the home was a “comfortable concentration camp,” Betty Friedan took this argument even further. Domesticity, she argued, led to “a sense of emptiness, non-existence, nothingness.” These conditions made it impossible “to retain a sense of human identity, the firm core of self or ‘I’ without which a human being, man or woman, is not truly alive.” Indeed, she wrote that these women were “in as much danger as the millions who walked to their own death in the concentration camps.”³⁹

Drawing on psychologist Bruno Bettelheim’s 1960 work *The Informed Heart: Autonomy in a Mass Age*, Friedan argued that a woman who lost “her sense of self” in domesticity underwent the same psychological processes as the concentration camp prisoners who adjusted to the conditions meant to bring about their dehumanization, becoming “walking corpses” (akin to Adler’s skeletons) who had “surrendered their human identity.” As prisoners were “forced to give up their individuality and merge themselves into an amorphous mass,” so, too, was Friedan’s archetypal American woman becoming “less than human,” losing her “individual identity to become an anonymous robot in a docile mass.” As prisoners, under threat of death, engaged in “work that did not emanate” from their “own personality” and permitted “no expression of self,” so did American women spend their days in work that was “endless, monotonous, unrewarding.” What connected these experiences, Friedan argued, was the inability to express one’s true self—for it was this, and not “the torture and the brutality,” which

³⁹ Ibid., 305.

“destroyed the human identity of so many prisoners.” She compared the literal death that concentration camp prisoners faced to the “slow death of mind” that greeted women as they lost their “core of self.”⁴⁰

The only way to avoid this dehumanization, both Adler and Friedan agreed, was to reclaim one’s individuality and take active steps to express it. Drawing again on Bettelheim, Friedan recounted his story of a concentration camp prisoner ordered to dance for an S.S. officer. In the course of the performance, she approached the officer, took his gun, and shot him. Although she herself was immediately shot to death in retribution, both Bettelheim and Friedan agreed that it was in dancing—a form of authentic self-expression—that this woman was able to reclaim her humanity and, however momentarily, exercise control over her own life. Friedan intended this anecdote as a lesson for American women. Despite the absence of life-or-death consequences, domesticity was a trap nonetheless. The only way to break free was to, “like the dancer, finally exercise their human freedom, and recapture their sense of self. They must refuse to be nameless, depersonalized, manipulated, and live their own lives again according to a self-chosen purpose.” Through fulfilling work, “the core of the self becomes aware, becomes real, and grows.”⁴¹ Interestingly, Bettelheim’s example of the dancer also linked both him and Friedan to such thinkers as Erich Fromm and Hannah Arendt and the young radicals in Students for a Democratic Society, all of whom argued that the performance of one’s true self—something artists were particularly capable of doing—was the key to resisting precisely the sort of fascism represented by Nazi concentration

⁴⁰ Ibid., 305-8.

⁴¹ Ibid., 334.

camps. Friedan likely also came to this idea through Abraham Maslow, who, as discussed in the introduction, also linked authenticity, self-actualization, and artists.

Stella Adler was more than happy to take up the torch of authenticity passed to her and other artists. She agreed that the best way to escape the prison of suburban domesticity was to find a vocation that functioned as an authentic expression of one's core self. The specific principles she passed on to students, moreover, emphasized action and independence, not emotion and contemplation, as the key to growth. In this way her teachings provided an aesthetic analogue to Betty Friedan's insistence that "'self-realization' or 'self-fulfillment' or 'identity' does not come from looking into a mirror in rapt contemplation of one's own image." Rather, "those who have most fully realized themselves...have done so in the service of a human purpose larger than themselves...through work and love."⁴² As the other groups and individuals discussed in this dissertation argued without exception, authenticity was useless unless it was acted upon and expressed.

Both Adler and Friedan, moreover, argued that a job one took for the sake of a paycheck was not the same thing as a true vocation. As Friedan put it, "the very argument, by Riesman and others, that man no longer finds identity in the work defined as a paycheck job, assumes that identity for man comes through creative work of his own." Similarly, an actor (to use Adler's gender-specific language) was likely to find the "tangible professions" foisted upon him by friends and family "too narrow for his chaotic soul." If one was by nature an actor, only in the theatre could "his own growth and power...[release] him from following useless and uncreative conventions." Just as the monotony of housework was not enough for women, so, too, was "everyday reality...not

⁴² Ibid., 333-34.

enough for the actor.” Just as women could only self-actualize when they followed their true vocation, so, too, when a young person “becomes an actor he achieves an independence and ability to grow.” Indeed, this undated material either echoed or anticipated Friedan nearly verbatim in its insistence that “to grow” was a young person’s “deepest and truest need when he says, ‘I want to be an actor.’”⁴³ Yet, despite her own enjoyment of luxury, Adler always emphasized the creative fulfillment, not the economic independence so important to second-wave liberal feminists, that came from work, suggesting that it was better to be a penurious artist than an economically stable doctor or lawyer.

In her teachings, Adler emphasized action, independence, and authenticity. She insisted that students learn, through concrete steps, to express what was inside them—and to rely on themselves to do so without help, direction, or approval from a teacher or director. Like Friedan, she encouraged students to think of themselves as autonomous individuals who existed separately from other people and to break free from the conventional behaviors they had adopted in order to fit in. In doing so, they both drew on popular ideas in mainstream psychology and applied them to women in particular.

A young person who signed up to take classes at the Stella Adler Studio, which opened its doors in New York City in 1949, would find her- or himself engaging in myriad introductory exercises before s/he touched a script or developed a full character. While this was not uncommon in acting schools at the time, what was uncommon was Adler’s focus on action. In political terms, she developed a nearly single-issue focus on this aspect of her students’ training. To Stella Adler, action depended on finding the “doable part” of a character. She was less interested in how a character—be it a human

⁴³ “Introduction,” undated, folder 1.2, Stella Adler Papers.

or, as in early exercises, a plant or animal—*felt* and more interested in what s/he *did*. As an emotion, for example, anger was useless to the performer. It was valuable only to the extent that the performer was able to discover how s/he *behaved* when angry. In practice, this meant turning nouns into verbs. Rather than playing a static element such as shyness, the performer would adopt the action, “to push away.”⁴⁴

If students embraced this focus on action, Adler believed, they would be able to behave authentically. She defined this as the genuine reaction each individual had to a particular situation, a personal reaction that came from deep inside them. Convention—the way people learned they *should* behave—was as anathema to Stella Adler as it was to Lee Strasberg, Tennessee Williams, Beat writing, and 1960s leftist activism. She hoped to inculcate in her students the opposite of conventional behavior, which, by its very nature, remained at the surface level, unconnected to a person’s true humanity. The danger in trying to play an emotional state such as anger or sadness was that the performer would focus on the result rather than the process, falling back on standardized responses intended to indicate one’s internal reality but only truly reflecting the dullness of conformity. They would imitate, rather than discover. The beauty of action was that it allowed for individuality; no two people would respond to the same circumstances in the same way.⁴⁵ In contrast to later feminists, especially the women’s liberationists who developed consciousness-raising strategies, Adler was interested in what distinguished

⁴⁴ Adler gave her students scores of exercises intended to convey this message. As just one example, see Beginner’s Lesson Twenty-Six: Characterization: Inner Elements, May 1, 1950, folder 1.7, Stella Adler Papers.

⁴⁵ As above, this was a thread that ran throughout her teaching materials. See for example Characterization Class, fall 1958, folder 1.9, Stella Adler Papers.

individuals from one another, *not* what they had in common. Her work contributed only to an individual feminist consciousness, not a collective one.

For students to be truly independent from the social forces telling them how to behave, they needed to be independent of acting teachers and directors as well. Adler never coddled her students, instead insisting that they develop the skills to use her techniques outside of the classroom. The goal of the teacher was to free the student “from the need to rely on anyone but himself [*sic*].” She believed it was absolutely crucial that students develop into autonomous, self-directed individuals who were secure in their own vocation. The consequences of helplessness and dependence could be dire. For one, students who did not develop their own sense of self were likely to believe what others said about them, and to determine success or failure based only on this external feedback.⁴⁶ Depending on others also made it impossible to grow. “I’m not a Mama,” she told students, comparing those who relied on her too much to equestrian jumpers who fell and broke their necks in competition because they had never learned to be independent from their teacher.⁴⁷ Self-reliance was what made self-actualization, to borrow a phrase from Friedan and humanistic psychology, possible.

There were several reasons why Adler’s technique developed the way it did. Her emphasis on action, for example, was a rejection of competing understandings of “the Method.” In its various iterations, Method acting involved attempts to recreate something real on stage—in contrast to the grand speech and broad gestures that had characterized theatrical acting. While its etymology derives from the Russian director and theorist Konstantin Stanislavsky, in the mid-twentieth century United States the term

⁴⁶ “Introduction,” undated, folder 1.2, Stella Adler Papers.

⁴⁷ Technique I, undated, folder 19.8, Stella Adler Papers.

was most closely associated with Lee Strasberg, with whom Adler had worked at the Group Theatre in the 1930s. Adler rejected Strasberg's interpretation of the Method for several reasons, including the dogmatism it engendered.

According to Adler, Stanislavsky had intended the Method to be "fluid." In recent years, however, it had become something of a cult: a narrow, rigid, and prescriptive interpretation of a technique intended to be just the opposite. By applying the Method "superficially," "badly," and "carelessly," Adler argued, Strasberg had created a generation of "mumbling, stumbling young actors, without vocal, physical, or emotional discipline."⁴⁸ She was inclined to throw these individuals out of her classes, recounting one particular story of a young actor whose mumbling was so pronounced that, Adler claimed, she could not understand him when he tried to tell her he was a Method actor.⁴⁹

This form of acting did not only offend her aesthetic sense, but also struck her as "disturbing," "danger[ous]," "vulgar, corrupt, and, yes, even sick." She compared the state of the Method in the 1950s to the early days of Christianity, when competing sects each claimed to know their religion's true form. As she told the story, one sect in particular grew strong and took it upon themselves to kill everyone who did not adhere to their particular set of beliefs. Strasberg's interpretation of Stanislavsky, Adler argued, posed a similar threat. It is easy to see how Adler's fears that dogmatism limited freedom of thought and expression resonated beyond acting classes; in the postwar United States,

⁴⁸ "Introduction," undated, folder 1.2, Stella Adler Papers.

⁴⁹ Technique I, undated, folder 19.8, Stella Adler Papers.

totalitarianism often seemed an imminent threat, and rejecting systematic thought in favor of individual truth functioned as its antidote.⁵⁰

The deepest rift between Adler and Strasberg, however, came over the technique known as affective memory. First developed by Strasberg at the Group Theatre in the 1930s, affective memory involved re-living traumatic experiences from one's own life in the service of particularly emotional moments in a play. Long skeptical of Strasberg's merits as a teacher and director, Adler came back from a 1934 meeting with Stanislavsky in Paris convinced that this technique was not only a gross misinterpretation of the Russian's ideas, but also that it was dangerous and damaging for the performer. Re-living painful experiences from one's own life was not acting, but rather psychological torture.⁵¹

Adler did share with Strasberg the belief that good acting came from a very personal place, but she insisted to her students that their goal was to discover how they behaved under particular circumstances—not how they felt. Personal experiences could be a valuable resource, but, as she put it to students in no uncertain terms, “ALL YOU CAN TAKE IS THE NATURE OF YOUR ACTION...ALL YOU TAKE IS THE NATURE OF DOING. YOU LEAVE THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF YOUR LIFE FOREVER.”⁵² Dwelling on emotion was “*dangerous* for the actor, as well as *cruel*.” Moreover, both because emotions inevitably remained internal and because focusing on a

⁵⁰ “Introduction,” undated, folder 1.2, Stella Adler Papers.

⁵¹ Smith, *Real-Life Drama*, 178-83.

⁵² Talk: “Nature of Experience,” Technique II – Principles II, 1963 [?], folder 21.3, Stella Adler Papers, emphasis in original.

memory would distract the performer from the task at hand, affective memory would not even produce good acting.

There was also a gendered element to the debate over affective memory, an angle of which Stella Adler may or may not have been consciously aware. Because the Strasberg version of the Method demanded that performers identify with their characters and draw on real-life situations analogous to those of their characters, and because the characters written for women often lacked agency, actresses were forced to re-live experiences in which they exercised very little control over their own lives. Although she did not address the special problems affective memory posed for women, Adler's emphasis on cultivating autonomy both in daily life and in the theatre makes it easy to imagine that, at least on some level, she was aware of these issues. Adler's emphasis on action, for example, could have had special meaning for her and other women as an implicitly feminist challenge to the traditional associations between women and emotion and men and action.

The importance Stella Adler placed on independence and authenticity seems to have sprung from the combination of personal experiences and observations of U.S. culture described above, experiences and observations that she shared with Betty Friedan. Both believed along with many other postwar thinkers that Americans had lost their full humanity, which was characterized by their ability to think for and express themselves truthfully. Instead, they had turned into conformists, stifling their thoughts and feelings in exchange for how they thought they *should* behave. This was particularly true of women, who lived their lives in de facto prisons. Accordingly, both Adler and Friedan placed the highest priority on breaking free from repressive social forces, exercising

control over one's own life, and finding fulfillment in something that was a true expression of one's full humanity.

Taken together, action, independence, and authenticity provided the antidote to what Stella Adler, Betty Friedan, and a host of other postwar commentators saw as the indistinguishable, unthinking, robotic mass the American citizenry had become. Like the thousands of Americans who misunderstood social critic David Riesman's ambivalence toward the other-directed individual, Adler and Friedan believed that it was absolutely crucial to develop an authentic, autonomous self free from the repressive forces of society. What they added to this discourse was the belief that women, too, were capable of accomplishing this feat.

Letters from Students

Over the years, Stella Adler received letters from scores of young people who felt deeply touched by her teachings. While some students wrote at Adler's behest as an introductory class assignment, many more wrote of their own initiative. The letters Adler received adhered overwhelmingly to a basic pattern: people who had felt phony, out of place, and unfulfilled by their lives finally felt the freedom to express their true selves, not just in the theatre but in their daily lives as well.

Both men and women expressed these feelings, but the letters from women added another layer. Before they worked with Adler, female letter writers said again and again, they had felt overwhelmed by the daily realities of their lives—the domestic and nurturing responsibilities that left little time or energy for their own self-expression and

self-fulfillment. Through acting, women wrote with gratitude, they were able to care for neglected parts of themselves.⁵³

Adler's teachings clearly had a positive impact on the young people who regarded her with love, gratitude, and devotion. Yet, the broader implications these letters have for the histories of gender and feminism deserve further attention. This is particularly true given the historical context in which these letters were written. While the above discussion of Adler's own aesthetic philosophy drew largely on materials from the 1950s and early 1960s, this section addresses a slightly later period from the late 1960s through the late 1970s, or high tide for second-wave feminism. A close examination of Stella Adler's work and students' responses to it sheds new light on various strands of this movement.

First, it reveals a different mode of dissemination for a feminist consciousness, particularly a liberal feminist consciousness, than has previously been recognized by historians. These young women developed the ability to name their discontent not through labor activism, the National Organization for Women, or reading *The Feminine Mystique*, but rather through exposure to an aesthetic philosophy that emphasized self-expression and self-fulfillment. Second, it shows that marking generational differences between liberal feminism and women's liberation does not always work. Adler's message of self-actualization resonated just as strongly with the demographic usually associated with liberal feminism, women in their mid-thirties and older, as with women in their early twenties, a cohort whose development of women's liberation historians usually trace

⁵³ While it is generally possible to identify the gender of the individuals writing these letters, they offer but few clues as to the race, class, sexual orientation, or age of each author (although most of Adler's students were young). While I do analyze the instances in which these characteristics are identified and inform the content of the letter, it is impossible to develop a sustained analysis about their function.

through their involvement in other social movements such as the struggle for racial justice, the student movement, and the Chicano/Chicana movement.⁵⁴ Finally, it suggests the limits of what a liberal feminist discourse of self-expression and self-fulfillment could and could not accomplish. Adler recognized the limitations that many women faced in their daily lives, but her proposed solutions of self-expression remained at the personal and individual, rather than social and structural, level.

“What You Teach Is Not for Acting—But for Living...”

Far and away the most common theme letter writers expressed was the idea that learning to act had taught them how to really live. Students wrote that they felt freer, awakened, and more alive. This did not break down along gender lines but rather was expressed by men and women alike. Like many in the generation of which they were a part—those coming of age in the 1960s and 1970s—they desired to strip away the falseness imposed upon them by society and express their true selves. What their more explicitly political generational cohorts hoped to achieve through educational reform, Marxist revolution, or beauty pageant protests, these young men and women found in acting.

A young woman with the initials L.S., for example, internalized Adler’s (and, by extension, Friedan’s) emphasis on expressing one’s inner self.⁵⁵ Before coming to Adler, she wrote, she had “encountered the...unique experience of living two different lives.”

Her goal was to “produce the ‘inside’ on the ‘outside,’” not only to bring her two selves

⁵⁴ See, for example, Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women’s Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980 [1979]); Evans, *Tidal Wave: How Women Changed America at Century’s End* (New York: The Free Press, 2003); Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women’s Movement Changed America* (New York: Penguin, 2000), and Benita Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America’s Second Wave* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁵⁵ To protect the privacy of these letter-writers, full names have been replaced with initials.

into alignment, but also so that she, like any “great and true actor” could act “as a medium for the God that lives within him [*sic*].” For L.S. as for many others, acting was important because it allowed her to feel like a whole, authentic individual whose actions matched her emotions. Adler’s reply to L.S. provided another iteration of this belief system. “Dear,” she wrote, “if you bring out the inside...take it outside...you will be an artist” (she also asked for a picture).⁵⁶

Often, students expressed their desire to use self-expression to solve the problems of society at large, yet the solutions they proposed tended to be personal and individual rather than social and structural. These young men and women believed in their ability to change the world for the better, but they located this agency in emotional affect rather than material change. As one letter writer put it, “I’ve always had the idea that the theatre was the place of ‘revelation.’ That is, a place where people could be shown not only what is, but what could be. If I had to give the theatre an over-all action, it would be to save the world.”⁵⁷ Despite Adler’s own rejection of emotion, that is, students often read onto her teachings a theory of social change that bore much in common with the one expressed by Tennessee Williams. Students brought to Adler’s classes a well-developed belief in emotion already gleaned from the broader culture, reading onto her teachings elements it did not contain. These “misreadings,” I argue, help to explain the appeal of Adler’s philosophy, as students recognized in it many elements of the humanistic psychology with which they were already quite familiar. Students conceptualized and subsumed Adler’s teachings, that is, within the rubric of what they already understood. I

⁵⁶ L.S. to Stella Adler, February 7, 1972, folder 26.2, Stella Adler Papers.

⁵⁷ To Stella Adler, undated, folder 26.2, Stella Adler Papers. Although the letter is undated, it is archived with those Adler received between 1969 and 1974.

intend this as no criticism of either Adler or her students, but rather as an explanation for why students were receptive to her teachings, as evidence for the pervasive nature of these ideas in postwar culture, and for the active role played by students themselves in determining the meaning of Adler's theories.

Student M.R. expressed a similar faith in the power of emotion. Although she began attending classes hoping only to become a better actress, she also learned "about love, about giving and about the very nature of life itself, and about understanding myself." She was convinced that "if every school in the world taught every person in the world about these beautiful things," it would result in "a better, bigger, more alive planet."⁵⁸

Writers generally did not expound on how this process would occur, but their letters point to a belief that witnessing and experiencing emotion would lead to social change. M.K., for example, drew on the common theme of self-expression. He wrote with great urgency, "my life is what my feelings are made up of and I must share them with people or I will die." He could not bear to have his true self stifled. However, he also desired to use his new skills to address "the grave problems facing our society." He and his friends had a plan to buy a video camera and make their own films, aiming not for fame or fortune but rather "to show the truth to the people." It was their hope that seeing "the truth" would incite people to action.⁵⁹

An unidentified young actress expressed a similar belief that experiencing and sharing emotions could heal the ugliness in the world. Learning to express what she felt

⁵⁸ M.R. to Stella Adler, undated, "Yellow Scrapbook," box 57, Stella Adler Papers. Although the letter is undated, it is archived with those Adler received between 1974 and circa 1979.

⁵⁹ M.K. to Stella Adler, folder 26.2, Stella Adler Papers. Although the letter is undated, it is archived with those Adler received between 1969 and 1974.

on the inside, she wrote joyfully, made her feel freer, more confident, and less self-conscious. However, she was ultimately more interested in how her personal development could affect other people. She wanted “to reach people...to relate to people.” The new freedom she found in acting allowed her to do this. It enabled her to “understand what these ‘*things*’ are inside me so I *can* give them away.” She felt this especially when “talking to an occasional [*sic*] bumb [*sic*] on the street—and feeling his gloveless hands in mine—and I cry and I let him see the tears.” The personal connection brought on by sharing an emotional moment, this young woman believed, had healing powers.⁶⁰

P.C. explicitly connected his belief in the power of emotion to his position as an African American. “Being Black and an American,” he wrote, “rejection and I, have been close associates, ever since I can remember.” He believed that, through acting, he would be able to connect with other people in ways he often found difficult in daily life. If he could “develop a sense of truth in every pause, move and word that I utter” and “do nothing that the audience nor I cannot fully believe,” he would be able to “give someone something, an insight, an emotional moment, something he did not have before my performance.” He hoped that, through his performance, others would feel the same compassion he felt for those “who life is giving the short end of the stick.” To P.C. as to others, including Tennessee Williams, letting the audience see one’s true self and true emotions was the key to increasing understanding in the world.⁶¹

“Throwing the Baby’s Bottle Down and Leaving for the Theatre”

⁶⁰ To Stella Adler, February 12, 1972, folder 26.2, Stella Adler Papers. The writer of this letter may have had the initials J.L.

⁶¹ P.C. to Stella Adler, October 10, 1968, “Green Scrapbook,” box 57, Stella Adler Papers.

To the themes discussed above, women letter writers often added the idea that acting lifted them out of what they identified as their petty concerns, mundane daily lives, and excessive concern for others. Here, the gender discrepancy is stunning: not a single man addressed this topic. Like Stella Adler, these writers recognized the enormity of women's domestic and caretaking labor. They also, like Adler, stopped short of proposing social or structural solutions to these problems, retaining their focus on the realm of individual self-expression. Finally, they emulated their teacher in imagining women's domestic and caretaking labor as antithetical to the artist's desire to "really live."

K.H. was one such letter writer who thought of her domestic life and her artistic life as competing poles between which there could be no reconciliation. Domestic life she associated with banality. Although she sometimes thought that domestic labor was "beautiful," "a ritual of life," something "of significance," she also knew that she was not fulfilled by it, nor was it what she really wanted. "About twenty years ago," she wrote, "I 'turned off' and floated off like a plankton. The things I did were not bad, but they were not what I really wanted or chose. I want to be less 'nice' and more serene, less capable and more achieving." She felt that, as she entered adulthood, she lost her sense of purpose and even her sense of self to what she identified as the pettiness of her daily life. "I'm tired of having to search for moments of me-ness wherever I am," she wrote. She saw her husband's life as more devoid of meaning than her own; all he cared about was "getting his dinner eaten and to a meeting on time...tomorrow his big idea might be getting to another meeting." To K.H., neither domestic labor nor meaningless wage work would bring her back in touch with her lost self. Rather, she argued that devoting her

“complete energy” to “creative expression” would bring her back to her “clean calm purpose...like going home.”⁶²

Women also wrote on the subject of romantic love. Often, they described a conflict between what they had been told they should want (fulfillment through a heteronormative relationship) and what they truly wanted (fulfillment through artistry). A woman with the first initial M., for example, wrote that her passion for acting had replaced her dreams of finding fulfillment solely through caring for her husband and children. Before she discovered acting, she wrote, she would have defined success as “teaching children or just one child to learn to love the French language” or as “creating a haven in some cottage by the sea for a man who had been tossed and turned by the winds of life and so needed the love I could give him.” She hoped that the love she would receive in exchange would provide “a release from the loneliness that seems to be a part of my being.” Now, though, M. saw these dreams as passive. She associated them, as would the female Beats discussed in the next chapter, with phoniness and purposelessness. She had “lived a life of perfect dishonesty” characterized by “years of drifting” (the same metaphor that K.H. used to describe her life before Adler). She wanted to “rid myself of all the nonsense I have poured over myself like layers of shellac.” Then, she would be able to “take the essence that is me and *learn to know* it, and *learn to use it properly* and *learn to let it speak!!*” This was of the utmost importance, “for if I do not soon learn to give of what is within me, I might just burst.”

⁶² K.H. to Stella Adler, undated, folder 26.2, Stella Adler Papers. Although the letter is undated, it is archived with those Adler received between 1969 and 1974.

For M., acting was an opportunity to abandon her former passivity and peel away the layers of societal expectation, especially regarding gender roles, to reveal her true self.⁶³

C., meanwhile, feared that her desire for romantic love was making it difficult for her to grow as an actress. “I cant [*sic*] see myself being anything other than an actor,” she wrote, “but I seem to have stopped getting anything out of what I experience. I find myself hell bent on cornering some sort of security.” Yet, she felt that she ceased to exist as an individual whenever she entered a relationship. As she put it, “I seem to love *so* deeply and care so easily that I disappear.” On the other hand, she would not “truly feel whole” until she knew she was loved. She worried, however, that this was “the kind of security that stagnates” one’s artistic development. C. was caught in a catch-22, and she knew it. She would not feel like a whole person until she had romantic security, but the self-erasure she believed was inherent in this kind of relationship was at odds with her desire to become a great actress.⁶⁴

At times, exposure to Adler’s teachings motivated women to make concrete changes in their lives. Student R.S. credited Adler with her decision, “after years of acceding to every outside need, obligation and excuse” used by both women and artists to justify “not serving her center,” to move to Athens, Greece. Although R.S. insisted that this was not a whimsical quest “to find the real and true” version of herself, she left no doubt that her move was inspired by Adler’s insistence that her teachings were “not for acting—but for living.” These lessons included spontaneity, self-expression, and self-care.

⁶³ M. to Stella Adler, September 30-October 1, 1970, “Green Scrapbook,” box 57, Stella Adler Papers.

⁶⁴ C. to Stella Adler, May 5, “Green Scrapbook,” box 57, Stella Adler Papers. This letter was likely written in the late 1960s or early 1970s.

R.S. drew an explicit contrast between her life in Greece and the life she lived in, and would again live if she returned to, Great Neck, New York. In Greece, she lived the spartan existence she associated with artists: few material possessions, but an abundance of inspiration. Although her life in Great Neck had afforded some opportunity to put Adler's lessons to work—she taught classes in which she used her training “to bring awareness...to many stratas of people in terms of dealing with the conflicts in their lives”—overall the picture she presented was one of stultifying suburban conformity.

R.S. attributed her decision to move to Greece to Adler's “talent to lift out of the prosaic—get it out of the kitchen” and her insistence that true artistry required “throwing down the baby's bottle and leaving for the theatre.” Stern associated the potential decision “to leave a heating coil and manuscript for the relative comfort of family” with a return to “the passivity of the accepted life.” In this view, one shared by Adler and many of her students, the reality of many women's daily lives was antithetical to the expression of one's true self through art. Attempts to write women into the culture of authenticity, that is, often recreated its most insidious gendered elements.⁶⁵

Similarly, F.R. saw acting as a way to distinguish herself from other women and the smallness of their lives. At thirty-five, she considered herself “overly ripe...to start any new profession,” but she had nonetheless decided to leave journalism to pursue her childhood dream of becoming an actress. Despite having, as she quipped, “an ‘understanding’ husband: i.e. he doesn't think I'll make it, but he's being a good sport,” she noted that “the running of the household” was one of her biggest problems. Even as she voiced her concerns about balancing her new profession with her daily domestic and

⁶⁵ R.S. to Stella Adler, September 25, folder 26.2, Stella Adler Papers. Although the letter does not give a year, it is archived with those Adler received between 1969 and 1974.

familial responsibilities, however, she chastised herself for worrying about such “petty” things. She was eager to escape the perceived smallness of domestic concerns and their suburban setting, which, like Adler, she saw as antithetical to true artistry. She dismissed a version of success that included “be[ing] the star of the latest PTA production,” arguing that she would “rather have a small part in a play an audience chose to attend.” Only by escaping the cultural bankruptcy bred by suburban conformity, she seemed to argue, was it possible to be a real artist.⁶⁶

L.S. was also inspired by Adler to change her life, although her experiences were a notable exception to the pattern described above. A California resident who had studied with Adler in the summer of 1971 and 1972, L.S. wrote to express her disappointment that there would be no summer session in 1973. In the course of the letter, L.S. revealed that she was inspired by Adler to leave her position as “a nude dancer in a beer bar” and begin “teaching my own dance classes.” Though her story was not one of escape from domestic mundanity and suburban conformity into self-expression and self-fulfillment, it resonates with many of the same themes. L.S. was inspired by Adler to exercise personal agency and autonomy, going from an object of others’ gaze to a person in charge of her life, labor, and body.⁶⁷

For other women, pursuing acting *was* a concrete change. They often wrote that their new vocation was something they were doing for themselves, in contrast to the years they had spent taking care of other people’s needs. This was particularly true of self-identified older, more established women, a minority among Adler’s students. It was not just the pursuit of a career but the inherently self-expressive nature of acting itself

⁶⁶ F.R. to Stella Adler, undated, “Green Scrapbook,” box 57, Stella Adler Papers.

⁶⁷ L.S. to Stella Adler, July 2, 1973, folder 26.2, Stella Adler Papers.

that led many women to see it as a corrective to the intensely other-centered nature of their lives up to that point.

M.M.W., for example, had spent much of her life caring for others rather than for herself. “It seems to me,” she wrote, “that throughout my life, I always managed to do whatever it was, to please some one [*sic*] else, to help someone else, to do for some one [*sic*].” Pursuing acting was a way of changing this. “Now,” she continued, “I want to do for myself...not for my husband, not for my children, nor my grandchildren.” She saw a chance “to develop who I am, my voice, my body, my being.”⁶⁸

Taken together, these letters go a long way toward explaining the link between liberal feminism and Stella Adler’s aesthetic philosophy. What male and female students shared with each other, as well as their more explicitly political generational cohorts, was the belief that the society in which they lived refused to let them be who they truly were. What female students, particularly those who were already wives and mothers, added to this was the recognition that their domestic and familial responsibilities were forcing them to bury their true selves. Because of its intense focus on taking control over one’s life, authentically expressing what was on the inside, and refusing to rely on anyone else for a sense of identity, Adler’s techniques both resonated with her students’ most deeply-held fears and served as a solution to them.

Conclusion

I have found no evidence that Stella Adler and Betty Friedan knew each other, nor that Adler even read *The Feminine Mystique*. She would not have needed to; she could

⁶⁸ Mary Menk Weisstein to Stella Adler, undated, “Yellow Scrapbook,” box 57, Stella Adler Papers. Although the letter is undated, it is archived with those Adler received between 1974 and 1979.

have written it herself. Both believed that the mass age in which they lived had taken away people's individuality, autonomy, and authenticity. For women trapped by the repressive conformity of suburban domesticity, the problem was increased tenfold. Both agreed, moreover, that a fulfilling vocation was the key to escaping from this prison. As I have argued above, these similarities point to many interesting lines of analysis.

First, following Daniel Horowitz, I locate Friedan, Adler, and liberal feminism squarely within postwar debates about individuality, autonomy, and mass culture. In these mass culture debates, authentic self-expression served as the key to escaping from the repressive social forces that kept individuals from thinking for themselves, with the enforced conformity of suburbia singled out as particularly harmful. It was a way, moreover, of distinguishing between the United States and the Soviet Union, in the process serving as a bulwark against totalitarianism. My work shows that these ideas played a role in determining the shape second-wave feminism would take when it emerged as a force to be reckoned with in the 1960s and 1970s.

In other ways, though, Adler and Friedan deviated from this consensus. They agreed with their contemporaries who, either explicitly or implicitly, argued that the realities of women's lives were antithetical to self-actualization. Indeed, this was an integral part of their shared philosophy. Where they differed from psychologist Abraham Maslow or social critic David Riesman was in providing a blueprint for women to overcome these obstacles.

Finally, my work shows that the cultural sphere cannot be ignored as a place where political consciousness was bred and disseminated. Despite the limitations of the philosophy she espoused, Stella Adler's students felt powerfully changed by exposure to

her teachings. They learned to take control over their own lives, express themselves truthfully, and refuse to make their identities contingent upon anyone else's. In other words, it was not necessary for women to read *The Feminine Mystique* to learn the lessons of self-actualization.

In part, this was so because students were primed by the broad postwar dissemination of humanistic psychology to think in precisely these terms. Yet, it seems clear that the time they spent in Adler's classes marked the first time that they recognized the relevance of these theories to their own lives *as women*. Adler, like Friedan, did not invent these ideas, but she certainly did much, consciously or otherwise, to put them in the service of a developing feminist consciousness. In doing so, she attempted to write women into the culture of authenticity from which they had been excluded.

What Adler and Friedan did *not* do, however, was insist that the reality of women's lives in itself was enough to grant them access to this culture. In my next chapter, I will turn to a group of women who did precisely this. In the face of male Beat writers who insisted that only the freedom and adventure of the road lent itself to the production of authentic art, women including Joyce Glassman Johnson, Hettie Jones, Diane DiPrima, and Anne Roiphe demanded recognition of both their own experiences and their emotions surrounding these experiences. In this way, Beat women pointed toward women's liberation in ways unimaginable to Stella Adler and Betty Friedan.

Chapter Four: “The Only Place in America That’s Alive”: Gender and Authenticity in Beat Writing

“If I had to go and apply for jobs like you, they’d have to drag me into Bellevue in two days...” —Jack Kerouac, 1957¹

In a 1999 interview with scholar Nancy M. Grace, writer Joyce Glassman Johnson argued that contemporary interest in memoirs derived in part from the fact that “it’s the age of confession, where confession has become the norm.”² As the previous chapters have shown, the years on which Johnson’s own memoir focused—her time as Jack Kerouac’s girlfriend in the 1950s—also featured a culture of confession, one in which the self was the only measure of truth and expressing one’s most deeply held thoughts, feelings, and beliefs functioned as a bulwark against totalitarianism. I have also argued that this insistence on self-expression and self-revelation was deeply fraught with gender implications. In this chapter, I will explore these themes in the realm of Beat writing. The Beats’ concept of authenticity, a central commitment to their identity, framed certain kinds of experiences as the only material on which worthwhile art could be based, and those experiences were nearly impossible for women to attain.³

¹ Jack Kerouac to Joyce Glassman, December 17, 1957, in Jack Kerouac and Joyce Johnson, *Door Wide Open: A Beat Love Affair in Letters, 1957-1958* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 105.

² Joyce Johnson, interview by Nancy M. Grace, May 15, 1999, in Nancy M. Grace and Ronna C. Johnson, eds., *Breaking the Rules of Cool: Interviewing and Reading Women Beat Writers* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004), 187.

³ There has been no dearth of scholarly interest in either the importance of authenticity to Jack Kerouac and his cohort or to the highly masculinist culture they inhabited and perpetuated, although much of it has come from literary scholars rather than historians. In addition to several biographies, including a sympathetic and highly readable one written by Ann Charters in consultation with the author, compelling, relatively recent work has been done by R.J. Ellis, who has argued that Kerouac was simultaneously obsessed with authenticity and cognizant of the impossibility of attaining it; Nancy M. Grace, who has stated that,

This gendering of authenticity took place on both ideological and material levels. Ideologically, Beat men saw women as too deeply imbricated in both banal (to them) domestic and familial responsibilities *and* wage work to break free from the repressive forces of conformity and become truly authentic. Nor, moreover, were the experiences that characterized many women's lives, including these domestic and familial responsibilities, considered useful fodder for the creation of art: in the minds of Beat men, novels were about cross-country jaunts, not changing diapers. On a material level, sadly legitimate fears for personal safety made it largely impossible for women to embark on the same adventures as their male counterparts. The federal government unintentionally contributed to this gendering of authenticity through its generous support of veterans through the G.I. Bill, which allowed many postwar men the freedom to go "on the road" in search of authentic experience.

An examination of Beat culture also sheds important light on postwar conceptions of identity. In the first part of this chapter, I draw primarily on the journal Jack Kerouac kept as he began in 1948-49 to write what would eventually become his most famous

although Kerouac's professed beliefs about aesthetic production ("spontaneous prose") relied on a belief in art as an unmediated representation of the self, his works themselves resisted this assumption; and Michael Hrebaniak, who sees Kerouac's emphasis on individuality as a form of protest against a corporatized and militarized America. As rich and exciting as these works are, disciplinary differences between their authors and myself mean that we often reach different conclusions. That is, because they are focused largely on textual analysis, they do not contextualize Kerouac's aesthetic philosophies as thoroughly within the various streams of postwar American thought as I would like. Less recent work, such as those done in the 1980s by Tim Hunt and Regina Weinreich, focused largely on Kerouac's craft, in part as a way of asserting his legitimacy as an object of scholarly curiosity. Two edited volumes by Ronna C. Johnson and Nancy M. Grace have also served in different ways as correctives to the largely invisible status of women within the movement. Finally, popular writings on the Beat generation abound. See Ann Charters, *Kerouac* (San Francisco: Straight Arrow Books, 1973); R.J. Ellis, *Liar! Liar!: Jack Kerouac—Novelist* (London: Greenway Exchange, 1999); Nancy M. Grace, *Jack Kerouac and the Literary Imagination* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Michael Hrebaniak, *Action Writing: Jack Kerouac's Wild Form* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2006); Tim Hunt, *Kerouac's Crooked Road: Development of a Fiction* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1981); Regina Weinreich, *Kerouac's Spontaneous Prose: A Study of the Fiction* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1987); Ronna C. Johnson and Nancy M. Grace, eds., *Girls Who Wore Black: Women Writing the Beat Generation* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002); Nancy M. Grace and Ronna C. Johnson, eds., *Breaking the Rules of Cool: Interviewing and Reading Women Beat Writers* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004).

novel, 1957's *On the Road*. Kerouac's anxieties surrounding inauthenticity, I argue, were connected to his fears of ideologies and systematic thought, linking him despite his conservative politics to the 1960s student left. His rejection of all overarching theories and analyses of the world in favor of individual truth should also be understood as a component part of an emerging identity politics.

Next, I draw on the memoirs of Joyce Glassman Johnson, Hettie Jones, Diane DiPrima, and Anne Roiphe to show the difficulties Beat, or otherwise countercultural, women had in their pursuit of authenticity, focusing in particular on the struggles between wage work and caretaking responsibilities on the one hand and art on the other. As their male counterparts constantly told them, women's lives were too narrow to produce authentic art. Yet, these women refused to accept this received wisdom, insisting on writing their own experiences and emotions into the culture of authenticity. Beat women thus functioned as the second wave, so to speak, of the pattern I identify and explore, in which women pushed back against men who extended the privilege of authenticity only as far as other men. Unlike Betty Friedan, Stella Adler, and her students, female Beats were eventually able to let go of the notion that women needed to escape from their conventional lives in order to achieve authenticity. For them, it was enough to write about their daily lives, experiences, and emotions, no matter how narrow or banal those lives seemed to someone like Kerouac. It was in this insistence that the truth of their emotions and experiences be recognized that women Beats most clearly and significantly anticipated the women's liberation movement.

Jack Kerouac and Authenticity

In late 1948 and early 1949, Jack Kerouac kept a journal describing the progress he was making in what would eventually become *On the Road*. Born into a family of French-Canadian descent in the manufacturing town of Lowell, Massachusetts, Kerouac attended Columbia University on a football scholarship before a broken leg ended his athletic career. He then spent brief stints in the Merchant Marine and the U.S. Navy. Kerouac was bored and annoyed with the Navy's strict regimentation, and his "indifferent character," as evaluating psychiatrists dubbed it, earned him an honorable discharge in 1943. For the next several years, he lived on and off with his parents (his mother after his father died in 1946) in Ozone Park, Queens, occasionally leaving for odd jobs, a brief marriage, and, after meeting Neal Cassady through Columbia student and poet Allen Ginsberg, the peripatetic events that would form the basis of *On the Road*. The first step in this process was the journal he began late the following year. Filled not only with descriptions of his writing process but also ruminations on friendship, philosophy, politics, and his unfulfilling coursework at the New School in New York, the journal functions as a showcase of the key aspects of the Beat concept of authenticity: a demand for interpersonal honesty and freedom from the society preventing it; an emphasis on individual, personal truth; a belief that wage work and consumerism were threatening and alienating; and a gendered view of what constituted real, authentic experience.

Authenticity was a concept to which Kerouac returned again and again in his journal. Like Dean Moriarty, Neal Cassady's fictionalized proxy in *On the Road*, as well as the 1960s student left, the author hoped to become "an artist of life."⁴ He and his

⁴Jack Kerouac, journal during *On the Road*, March 25, 1949, folder 1.3, Jack Kerouac Papers, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas, Austin [hereafter "Jack Kerouac Papers"].

friends considered themselves “patriots of the self.”⁵ Yet, Kerouac often criticized himself for failing to live up to his own standards. “What have I done these days?” he asked himself, “a big nothing...When will I start living? All I did today was write letters and sit around.” Whatever “living” was, it was neither the thoughtful rumination of the letter writer, nor the quiet life of a student living in his mother’s home. “Half of life is death,” he insisted gloomily after listing all of the class papers he had to write, “angry uprooted work [that] drives me silly.” Interestingly, Kerouac wrote less when he felt that he *was* truly living. His next entry was not for two weeks, and then it was to note that “much happened in past 2 weeks. Reason why I don’t want to continue to diary is because it disturbs me by its falseness...and actually impedes my living.”

Unsurprisingly, those two weeks consisted of trips between North Carolina, where Kerouac’s sister lived, and New York with Neal Cassady, incidents that would be fictionalized in *On the Road*. But if these experiences constituted the basis of Kerouac’s rejection of journal writing—“diaries are for lonely men,” he argued—it is interesting that he still felt the need to memorialize them in writing, both in the journal and in his most famous novel. Writing may have impeded living, but it was living that made writing possible.

Although the myth of Kerouac’s “spontaneous” prose—he spent years preparing to write the famous, Benzedrine-fueled 1951 scroll version of *On the Road*—is now known to be just that, the then twenty-six-year-old author himself seems to have perceived no incompatibility between his painstaking, carefully monitored progress and a free, authentic form of writing. On November 29, 1948, for example, he noted that since he started writing three weeks earlier, he was averaging 1500 words per day. “I delight in

⁵ Kerouac, journal, week of Monday, March 7, 1949, folder 1.3, Jack Kerouac Papers.

these figures,” he wrote, “because they are concrete evidence of a greater freedom in writing than I had in *Town & City*,” his first novel. Yet, even this relative freedom was not enough to quiet his feelings of “emptiness...emptiness and even falseness.”⁶

The next day, Kerouac hinted that what was causing these feelings of emptiness and falseness was a discrepancy between what he was feeling on the inside and what he expressed on the outside. Consumed by feelings of rage at the everyday lives he believed people around him were mindlessly leading, he fantasized about lashing out in violent, destructive fashion. Inspired by his twenty-two-year-old friend John Clellon Holmes, the future novelist who developed a mantra based on “honesty and safety and knowledge,” Kerouac speculated that the only way to “exterminate the brutes” of his feelings was through “complete self-honesty.” By recognizing and exploring, rather than suppressing, his feelings—by grasping “the ‘life of it,’” the lessons to be learned from his experiences—he could attenuate their hold over him. The author thus differed from the other figures discussed in this dissertation, for whom the need for self-expression derived from a belief in the essential goodness of the self and for whom authenticity functioned as a way of *becoming* oneself. Kerouac’s characteristic unhappiness, by contrast, led him to value authentic self-expression as a way of *escaping* himself.⁷ Later in life, the desire to escape himself led Kerouac to Buddhism, which insisted on the mythical nature of the individual self. “The biggest trouble,” he wrote in 1954, “is hangup on self, on ego-

⁶ Kerouac, journal, November 29, 1948, folder 1.3, Jack Kerouac Papers.

⁷ Kerouac, journal during *On the Road*, November 30, 1948, folder 1.3, Jack Kerouac Papers.

personality...I am only Jack when I act like myself, which is mean, silly, narrow, selfish.”⁸

In the late 1940s, Kerouac had not yet discovered Buddhism, and unfettered self-expression was the only tool available to him to escape himself. His friendship with Holmes, whose novel *Go* would begin in 1952 to popularize Beat culture, was one of the key places in which Kerouac attempted to cultivate this “complete self-honesty.” Kerouac was so desperate to secure the younger man’s approval that he shared with him not only his fiction, but also his journals, and he was thrilled to receive Holmes’ copious feedback on both. According to Kerouac, Holmes was “a guy who refuses to let life slip out of his hands—intense he is, and avid with interests. His vocabulary may be heavy with expressions like ‘come to terms with’ but he himself digs in when he least realizes it. My days lately are filled with him and I have yet to judge his tendencies, but as a friend he couldn’t be more satisfying, absorbing, and good.” While Kerouac admitted that he had not yet read his friend’s writing, his faith in Holmes’ honesty made him unable to believe that it would be anything but stellar. That is, Kerouac believed that the quality of one’s writing was directly proportional to the degree of honesty with which one lived. “I *believe* in his avidity,” Kerouac wrote, “and he is so honest-seeking that I perversely feel dishonest.”⁹

Kerouac’s relationship with Holmes led him to monitor his own honesty and authenticity intently. He was aware of, and uneasy with, the lack of reciprocity in their relationship; while he had revealed much to Holmes, Holmes had not done the same.

⁸ Jack Kerouac to Carolyn Cassady, July 2, 1954, folder 2.6, Neal Cassady Papers, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas, Austin [hereafter “Neal Cassady Papers”].

⁹ Kerouac, journal during *On the Road*, December 1, 1948, folder 1.3, Jack Kerouac Papers.

“*John is watching me closely (reading my diaries, even),*” he noted, “and I haven’t learned a thing about him yet and this is a complaint. Two observant novelists observing each other and that is a vacuum.” As in the Foucauldian panopticon, Holmes became for Kerouac the observer whose presence could never be determined and so must always be assumed. “As I write all this,” he admitted with some anxiety, “I have the feeling that it’s all words, that I’m deliberately hedging, that he’s ‘watching’ me, and that ‘I won’t tell’...I have the feeling that I *force* these observations out because he has read my diaries and *may even read this one someday.*” Insisting that “I have nothing to hide that is worth hiding,” Kerouac then addressed Holmes directly. “Listen here John Holmes,” he began, “go fuck yourself!”

Put up your dukes, as Neal [Cassady] says. Come on, man, let’s hide nothing and no more, tell all, all. Are you really telling all? Am *I* really telling all? Put up your dukes, everybody, this is the way we’ll live from now on—we’ll put up our dukes and dissolve the hypocrite’s agreement and become same and sane. Come on!—Because this is what makes us want to live and work and love, this myth-breaking and unveiling for each other, and the confession of daydreams...this is the material we have to work with in this life, and out of it, though, come the most beautiful things and situations in creation.¹⁰

Kerouac and Holmes were eventually able to resolve this impasse in their friendship. After a “long talk” that same day, Kerouac confessed his anxieties and “even told him about my entry in this diary concerning his peeking-over-my shoulder.” The two “agreed that complete honesty is the only answer in that situation as in all situations.”¹¹ To a certain extent, then, Kerouac’s insistence that a truly humane existence depended on authenticity mirrored Tennessee Williams.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ronna C. Johnson’s essay on the author’s “pre-postmodernism” also makes the connection to Foucault’s panopticon, albeit in the context of Kerouac’s later writings and public appearances. Ronna C. Johnson, “‘You’re Putting Me On’: Jack Kerouac and the Postmodern Emergence,” *College Literature* 27, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 30. On the panopticon, see Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995 [orig. trans. 1977]).

Yet, the discomfort Kerouac experienced surrounding being watched reveals much about his concept of authenticity. First, while the equation of “same and sane” may seem startling, given the Beats’ emphasis on individual self-expression, Kerouac did not see each person’s individuality as threatened by a fundamental sameness based on “God’s truth [alternately love].” This “myth-breaking and unveiling,” moreover, was inherently gendered, for Kerouac saw it in direct contrast to the desire to “hide behind the skirts of Mother Respectability.” The figure who precluded honesty, authenticity, and, by extension, a life worth living, was female. As I argue in more detail below, the dichotomy between male/authentic and female/inauthentic did not remain in the symbolic realm, but rather was one of the fundamental characteristics of male Beats’ real-life relationships with women.

Kerouac’s mother, Gabrielle, from whom he was never able to separate himself, was one of these women. Although devoted to her, he also saw her practicality as trampling on his dreams. One fantasy that Kerouac and his friends, including Neal Cassady, liked to imagine was one day buying a farm or ranch together. Cassady met Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg while visiting his friend Hal Chase, a student at Columbia, in early 1947, setting the stage for the adventures that would be fictionalized in *On the Road*. By 1948, Cassady and his wife Carolyn were living in California, although he was away for months at a time for his job with the Southern Pacific Railroad. It was at this point that he constructed a plan detailing how long it would take to save up enough money to buy a farm and who would live there with them, and the following spring Kerouac used his journal to keep lists of the kinds of vegetables they would grow.¹² In

¹² Neal Cassady to Jack Kerouac, July 5, 1948, folder 1.8, Neal Cassady Papers; Kerouac, journal, April 1949, folder 1.3, Jack Kerouac Papers.

both men's cases, frustratingly practical women seemed to stand in the way of making these dreams a reality. In 1948, Cassady's wife, Carolyn Cassady, irritated him by pointing out the issue "of incompatibility, confusion in management (who'll do the dusting, to be decided over the breakfast table.)" He described these preoccupations as "Carolyn's block." He argued that, by contrast, "I have no block. I have no fears: I know that this sort of plan or modification will be the ultimate solution for our desires."¹³ To Neal Cassady, worrying about such household matters was a waste of time, but his wife did not have this luxury. A few months later, Kerouac had the wind blown out of his sails by his mother, who, he noted, "feels that it will all come to naught, and her hunches are always right, Goddamnit."¹⁴

Kerouac also saw paid work as a threat to authenticity. He identified with *Bartleby the Scrivener*, the eponymous protagonist of Herman Melville's 1853 short story, famous for the constant refrain of "I would prefer not to." "I realized why 'we modern intellectuals' are so fascinated by *Bartleby*," Kerouac wrote in his journal, "it is our dead-end souls in the cities." Although many postwar artists and cultural commentators apotheosized the city (New York City in particular) as a bastion of authenticity and a panacea to the perceived repressive conformity of the suburbs, to Kerouac this was not the case. Rather, he romanticized the small town, as in his first novel, and the open road, as in his most famous. It was not, however, *Bartleby*'s locale that most deadened his soul; it was wage labor itself. Describing *Bartleby* as "a catatonic case, a depressive," Kerouac confessed that "I am one, too." He, too, "'preferred not to work.'" Yet, he found *Bartleby*'s form of protest against the alienating nature of wage

¹³ Neal Cassady to Jack Kerouac, July 5, 1948.

¹⁴ Kerouac, journal, January 15, 1949, folder 1.3, Jack Kerouac Papers.

labor to be too limited. “I don’t blame Bartleby,” he wrote, “but I myself ‘prefer’ some other line of willfulness that is closer to human communication. Still, you can’t say that Bartleby was *not* communicating; he is beautiful; it’s only that all of us feeling like that would perish, though I don’t deny this might be acceptable, too. I don’t prefer to ‘get a job’ either, but I don’t prefer to die.” Bartleby’s combination of outer resignation and inner protest were not enough for the postwar writer.¹⁵

What Kerouac found particularly upsetting was that these attempts to force creative young people into alienating wage labor came not from “American commercialism” but rather from precisely those members of the intelligentsia who professed to be a bulwark against commercialism’s pervasive influence. In December, already in a foul mood after having *The Town and the Country* rejected by the publisher Little, Brown two days earlier (he would eventually sell the novel to Harcourt, Brace the following March), Kerouac ran into George P. Putnam in a bar. The eminent publisher reportedly “said I had better start growing up and go to work (job).” In the eyes of adults, Kerouac felt, “as an artist I am more and more becoming a vermin.” Moreover, he argued that “it is not ‘American commercialism’ that says this, *remember this important fact*, it is all these Diamonds & Webers and Putnams of the American Intelligentsia—and please remember that. American Commercialism isn’t bothering me, it’s these people who are suppose to be the bearers of the torch against commercialism. I’ll remember that if you won’t.”¹⁶ Although neither his worldview nor his conservative politics allowed for a structural critique of capitalism, Kerouac’s protests against the intelligentsia in some ways anticipated the criticisms members of the 1960s student left would levy against the

¹⁵ Kerouac, journal, December 5, 1948, folder 1.3, Jack Kerouac Papers.

¹⁶ Kerouac, journal, December 9, 1948, folder 1.3, Jack Kerouac Papers.

university as a place that only prepared young people to become cogs in the capitalist machine.

At times, Kerouac saw women and wage labor conspiring to snatch away the young artist's ability to live authentically. In the winter of 1948-49, he was involved with a married woman named Pauline. From the beginning, their relationship had problems; Kerouac felt that a repressive culture of surveillance made it impossible for the two to forge a real connection. As he noted on December 12, "Last night I saw Pauline again. It was very sad. We can't reach each other through the prison-bars of the world. On all sides there are warders, judges, attorneys, witnesses, and executioners."¹⁷ By the next month, the relationship had soured to the extent that Pauline seemed ready to end it altogether. In a letter written to Kerouac and quoted in his diary, she wrote, "My husband isn't a bastard like the likes of you. You couldn't even polish his shoes. The pity of it all is this, that I can't get you to go out and work. I'd make you work so damn hard the sweat would fall from your brow like the rain you keep talking about. That's the only thing that will save you. Work, Manual Labor...I suggest that you try writing about *real people* like us and not jerks like Doctor Sax and his rainy nights."¹⁸

Undeterred, Kerouac professed to happily reject the trappings of respectability. He chose instead to "reconcile myself to my 'madness,'" refusing to "'grow up' and reject the innocence of birds for the complicity of men."¹⁹ As he saw it, "men of destiny" like himself were "always martyring their own joys... Who am I?—I burn. That's all, period. There is no satisfaction in this heart... What do I want?—I want to burn, that's

¹⁷ Kerouac, journal, December 12, 1948, folder 1.3, Jack Kerouac Papers.

¹⁸ Quoted in Kerouac, journal, January 15, 1949, folder 1.3, Jack Kerouac Papers.

¹⁹ Kerouac, journal, December 12, 1948, folder 1.3, Jack Kerouac Papers.

all.”²⁰ Kerouac was so single-minded in his pursuit of intense feeling that he did not care if he alienated others in the process. In this, he was more extreme even than some of his friends, including fellow former Columbia student Lucien Carr, who “worried about” Kerouac’s “loutishness.” Kerouac, however, celebrated his deviations from the norms of middle-class respectability, choosing like Stanley Kowalski to “glorify” it.²¹ “Don’t crowd me, world!” he taunted his imagined readers.²²

Given the vitriol with which he rejected wage labor, how was Kerouac able to meet his basic material needs? He did work odd jobs, although never for an extended period of time. He did not come from a wealthy family, and it would be years before he would be able to support himself from writing alone. Certainly he received a great deal of financial support from his mother and the women with whom he was involved, and occasionally their families (he and his first wife Edie Parker lived for a time with her parents in Michigan). As Joyce Johnson, whose memoir *Minor Characters* is discussed below, described her time with Kerouac, her steady job allowed her to provide him with a free place to stay whenever he was in New York. She also covered the cost of his expenses, including food, when he stayed with her. Occasionally, she sent him travel money to allow for his cross-country jaunts. Women’s paid labor thus subsidized male Beats’ pursuit of authentic living.

Crucial financial support also came from one other source: the U.S. government. As an honorably-discharged veteran, Kerouac was entitled to the generous G.I. Bill benefits enacted in 1944. These benefits allowed him not only to take college classes, as

²⁰ Kerouac, journal, January 15, 1949, folder 1.3, Jack Kerouac Papers.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Kerouac, journal, January 16, 1949, folder 1.3, Jack Kerouac Papers.

he was doing at the New School in New York, but also provided the time (because he was not tied to a job) and the resources (for bus tickets, food, and the like) to go “on the road” in pursuit of the experiences deemed necessary to produce authentic art. As he noted at the end of 1948, “Today I received a check for \$160.00 from the Vets Administration—Good! I’m grateful. Now I have a little money for once, and can go to California to ship out if Neal [Cassady] is willing to go in January. Also, it’s money for the rent, for Christmas, for the house, for a few shirts, and maybe I’ll buy a few records. I’m happy again today. We’ll start saving our money now, all of us, for a farm someday. And I’ll go on writing.”²³ In the dominant aesthetic philosophy of the day, great art derived only from (certain acceptable forms of) experience, and one could not pursue experience if one lacked the necessary resources. Thus, as these veterans’ benefits attached more commonly to men than to women, the federal government unintentionally subsidized the Beat movement and contributed to the gendering of authenticity.

Relatedly, the G.I. Bill even structured the narrative of *On the Road*, in which Kerouac’s fictional alter ego Sal Paradise, like the author himself, went “on the road” whenever he received a payment (although the fictional incarnation also received funds from his aunt). In Part One of the novel, set in July of 1947, Sal notes that “having saved about fifty dollars from old veteran benefits, I was ready to go to the West Coast.” At the end of Part Two, Sal notes that “Dean and I goofed around San Francisco until I got my next GI check and got ready to go back home.” On the next page, Part Three begins with Sal telling readers, “In the spring of 1949 I had a few dollars saved from my GI education checks and I went to Denver, thinking of settling down there.” It is no coincidence that each section begins with a discussion of the G.I. Bill (in Part One, it is

²³ Kerouac, journal, December 11, 1948, folder 1.3, Jack Kerouac Papers.

mentioned immediately after Sal provides the context of his recently disintegrated marriage, and in Part Two it is mentioned solely in connection with educational benefits), for in each case it provides the narrative impetus for what follows. Thus, the U.S. government, again unintentionally, affected the very form of the novel and thereby helped to cultivate a Beat aesthetic. One of the very institutions that enforced the conformist mandate of the postwar era also funded protests against this conformity.²⁴

Kerouac also developed an aesthetic philosophy that delineated the intellectual from the emotional, clearly holding the latter as superior. This belief often put him at odds with recognized arbiters of taste. In December of 1948, for example, he and Allen Ginsberg attempted to challenge a writing instructor name Weber, who tried to convince them to separate themselves from their own art. “I also told Weber I did not believe in criticism of any kind and wrote because it was a prayer to God,” Kerouac noted in his journal. The instructor, by contrast, argued that “criticism should be accepted on an intellectual level, not emotional.” Undeterred, Kerouac insisted that “everything is emotional.” When Ginsberg defended his friend’s point of view “in his own lush language,” Weber dismissed them as “‘mystics’ of some sort.”²⁵

Kerouac’s privileging of the emotional over the intellectual was also connected to his distrust of systems or totalizing theories. In a class essay written on Thomas Wolfe, he distinguished between the qualities of what he termed “intellectual” and “metaphysical” minds. The intellectual, he argued, was obsessed with sorting, classifying, and labeling. Faced with “the choice of words used to deal with the spectacle of a man ‘musing on eternity,’” the intellectual, “in his haste to dispense with the matter

²⁴ Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (1957; repr., New York: Penguin, 1976), 9, 109, 178-9.

²⁵ Kerouac, journal, December 9, 1948, folder 1.3, Jack Kerouac Papers.

conveniently, would describe the thing as ‘wonderingly thinking.’ This is the description, the label. The intellectual moves on from there to the re-arrangement of other labels and other systems of labellings.” The intellectual “stops at the description of a thing and makes its label, files away the meaning as ‘absolute,’ and moves on—dumbly mulling all the way, rearranging, pasting, pigeonholing, balking, sulking up. There is the sulkiness of such a form of mind.”²⁶

By contrast, the metaphysical mind knew that all classifications and systems were contingent, that there was no absolute way to order the world. The person who hewed to this philosophy saw the world, and all of the people and objects in it, as alive, always changing and growing, and thus resistant to definitive description. Describing a ship, for example, a metaphysical mind would “[affix] some kind of living quality,” seeing the object “as being, really, something almost alive.” In contrast to “the prose-sense of the intellectual,” “the poetry-sense of the metaphysician,” someone like Shakespeare, was “concerned with the furthest possible reach of an idea, or image, and the most basic, simple, possible way of evoking this feeling on the edge of relative meaning (no meaning is absolute, only God perhaps is absolute.)” Applied to his own writing, Kerouac translated the metaphysical resistance to systematizing into a mandate never to “create effects, as in ‘recreating atmosphere,’ when those mere effects come naturally (as in life) as a result of desired events.” Rather, he hoped to “write as you might live”—without attempting to fit the experiences into a preordained structure.²⁷

In Kerouac’s mind, this belief put him outside the mainstream of American cultural and intellectual life. In many ways, though, he swam squarely within postwar

²⁶ Kerouac, journal, February 20-1, 1949, folder 1.3, Jack Kerouac Papers.

²⁷ *Ibid.*,

currents, as, for instance, sociologist Daniel Bell's announcement of the end of ideology, which he identified as the failure of systematic thought in the face of Stalinism. Kerouac would likely have agreed. He compared America of the late 1940s to the gold rush of a century earlier: "This is what is still going on in America," he wrote, "They've unhitched the horses from the wagons—from their souls—and gone off like whores for a little gold. Sometimes, in this age, the cupboard of home is bare for the sake of some golden automobile, which is used to go around in traffic circles...we refuse the joys of life, which is essentially as simple as a tree, with birds in it." As Kerouac went on to make clear, however, he condemned less the postwar consumerist ethos and more the perceived mandate to think a certain way. "The closest thing to Fascism in America," he argued, "after the Ku Klux Klan and racial discrimination of all kinds, is the liberal intellectual *demand* that everyone comply with the rules set down as to how to think and what to do." Like those who flocked to California in the 1840s in the hopes of striking it rich, liberal intellectuals, in Kerouac's view, "have unhitched the horse from the simple truth, and gone off sweating after the golden, glittering, false solution. It's all a big *gold strike* in the 20th Century—but those old wagons are still rolling!" While he acknowledged that this iconoclasm made him a "reactionary," he insisted that "I do not demand that anyone believe and act as I do, nor that they believe and act in any other particular way." In certain respects a libertarian, he believed that true progress could only be effected "by each of us generally minding his own business."²⁸

In his privileging of the self over ideology, however, Kerouac's views actually reflected those of two groups he tried to distance himself: not only the liberal Cold Warriors of the late 1940s and 1950s, but also the student radicals of the next decade. As

²⁸ Kerouac, journal, April, 1949, folder 1.3, Jack Kerouac Papers.

chapters five and six will show, these young activists would brook no overarching theories, ideologies, or systems of thought, instead making their own experiences, beliefs, and emotions the only bastion of truth. The political orientations of these groups were in fact quite different. Despite a belief in personal freedom, Kerouac's conservative Catholicism led him to enthusiastic support for Richard Nixon, which would have been decidedly unpopular among members of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), for example. What these groups shared, however, was a more fundamental belief in the self as the most accurate, indeed the only legitimate, source of truth and knowledge, rejecting wholesale those ideologies, systems, and theories that attempted to define reality without regard for actual human experience. It is also worth pointing out that for both groups, a belief in authentic selfhood translated into a troubling racial romanticism. In an oft-quoted passage from *On the Road*, Kerouac's Sal Paradise lamented the fact that his whiteness supposedly kept him from fully experiencing life, spending his time in Denver

wishing I were a Negro, feeling that the best the white world had offered was not enough ecstasy for me, not enough life, joy, kicks, darkness, music, not enough night...I wished I were a Denver Mexican, or even a poor overworked Jap, anything but what I was so drearily, a "white man" disillusioned...[I wished] I could exchange worlds with the happy, true-hearted, ecstatic Negroes of America.²⁹

As chapter six will show, vestiges of this belief continued to permeate the thinking of many SDS members.

The anti-ideological, anti-systematic bent of Beat writers also factored into a 1952 *New York Times* article titled "This Is the Beat Generation," in which twenty-six-year-old *Go* author and Kerouac friend John Clellon Holmes attempted to define and explain the generation of which he was a part. The novel, which had come out earlier that year, was

²⁹ Kerouac, *On the Road*, 179-80. See, for example, Andrew Ross, *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 68-9.

based on Holmes' own experiences and included characters based on his friends, including Jack Kerouac, to whom he attributed the term "Beat." It was not insignificant to Holmes that the young people he described in the article constituted a generation in the concrete sense of an age cohort; its members had been shaped by Depression childhoods and wartime adolescences. Together, these experiences inculcated in this generation's members an "instinctive individuality, needing no bohemianism or imposed eccentricity," a "distrust" of "collectivity." Having witnessed firsthand the disastrous effects of adult morality, including economic depression and war, they had come to believe that only the individual could be trusted. Primarily a worldview rather than an aesthetic sensibility, the term "Beat" connoted "the feeling of having been used, of being raw. It involves a sort of nakedness of mind, and, ultimately, of soul. In short, it means being undramatically pushed up against the wall of oneself." As the article went on to make clear, after years and decades of upheaval, these young people had come to believe that only authentic individual experience—*not* ready-made belief systems—could serve as an adequate barometer of truth. They were a generation, as Holmes put it, who had been forced to rely "more on one's human endurance than on one's philosophy of life."³⁰

Despite their individualism, despite their professed lack of faith in any value or belief system, it was precisely the search for "personal and social values" that fundamentally defined the Beat generation. It was a generation characterized by a simultaneous "*will* to believe" and "an inability to do so in conventional terms." As Holmes put it, "unlike the Lost Generation, which was occupied with the loss of faith, the Beat Generation is becoming more and more occupied with the need for it." Holmes did not mean faith in a merely religious sense, although certainly Beats were well-known for

³⁰ John Clellon Holmes, "This Is the Beat Generation," *New York Times*, November 16, 1952.

searching for meaning outside of the western tradition, but rather in the sense of an adequate belief system, capaciously understood. They had “had enough of homelessness, valuelessness, faithlessness.” They yearned, too, for connection with other human beings, but “the failure of most orthodox moral and social concepts to reflect fully the life they have known” turned “each person” into “a walking, self-contained unit.” The dilemma that confronted the Beat generation in 1952 was the same dilemma that would confront SDS in 1962, and thus his article reads almost as an early draft of their early manifesto, the Port Huron Statement: how could one develop a system of values and beliefs in a world in which *all* belief systems, “all invented gods” would “invariably disappoint those who worship them?”³¹

As Holmes was likely aware, Kerouac was also not alone among his acknowledged peers; his friends Neal Cassady and Allen Ginsberg also equated authenticity with eschewing systems of thought that privileged ideology over experience. In Ginsberg’s case, this belief translated into actual participation in the 1960s anti-war movement. As he wrote in a 1948 letter to Cassady, “lately I have sensed in works of art—K’s (Kerouac) for one—the *real*... The inner, *absolute*, knowledge of a man can be expressed. His whole nature can be perpetuated in *living* intellegeble [*sic*]—even immortal—form.”³² Over twenty years later, he noted that “greed for possession of matter and robotlike reproduction of selfish ego has amassed and concentrated metals and synthetics in vast poisoned cities across the land smothering and contaminating fellow-sentient life forms” and “leading to the creation of the single largest monopoly on thought and matter ever fabricated in the known history of the planet namely the Military-

³¹ Ibid.

³² Allen Ginsberg to Neal Cassady, spring 1948, folder 2.1, Neal Cassady Papers.

Industrial Pentagon.”³³ That is, the dehumanizing nature of the military-industrial complex, which sought to crush the individual by imposing its own insurmountable values, was in direct contrast to the artist’s expression of her or his true self and individual reality. For the other two men, due both to inclination and deteriorating health (Cassady was dead by the time Ginsberg wrote these later words, and Kerouac would soon follow), the connection would remain abstract. Although the 1960s student left identified with Kerouac, he did not identify with them.

One thing Jack Kerouac and the white men who dominated the 1960s left did share was a common gender politics. As Beat men insisted that women’s lives were too narrow to produce authentic art, New Left men argued that women were too bound up with material concerns to escape from the inauthentic mass and contribute to a participatory democracy. As the following section will make clear, women’s liberationists were not the first to push back against this sexist deployment of authenticity. Rather, they drew on a pattern established in the 1950s and early 1960s, when women including Joyce Glassman Johnson, Hettie Jones, Diane DiPrima, and Anne Roiphe attempted to write their own truths into the culture of authenticity.

Women Write Themselves in

Born in 1935, Joyce Glassman grew up in a respectable, although by no means wealthy, Jewish family. Her father was an auditor for Metropolitan Tobacco Company, where he kept books until his death in 1960; her mother had given up dreams of pursuing a career as a concert singer to marry her father. Glassman’s parents thought of

³³ Allen Ginsberg, “Inspired by an Attack of Bell’s Palsy: For the National Institute of Art and Letters,” April 8, 1969, folder 1.1, Allen Ginsberg Papers, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas, Austin.

themselves as “genteel,” especially in comparison to her mother’s loud, boisterous relatives, and it was to escape this world that the three of them moved in 1945 from Queens to Manhattan’s Upper West Side, within sight of Barnard, the school Glassman would attend, and Columbia, where Jack Kerouac had been a student a few years before.³⁴

As Glassman saw it, the defining characteristic of her parents’ lives was a lack of passion. Her father did not love his job, which both of her parents had always assumed was merely a stepping-stone to a position better suited to his talents, but his loyalty to the company made him reluctant to look elsewhere. Years later, as a college student at Barnard, Glassman would think of her parents, and especially her father, when she came across Henry David Thoreau’s line, “The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.” (In what became the defining feature of Glassman’s own life, she resolved that she would “rather die than be like ‘the mass of men.’”) Indeed, the only time she remembered her father expressing powerful emotion was in anger over her suggestion at age seven that the two of them run away together. His response to this plan was to slap her.³⁵

Despite, or perhaps precisely because of, their lack of passion, Glassman felt a great deal of pressure to conform to her parents’, especially her mother’s, ambitious plans for her future. Unable to pursue her own musical talents, Glassman’s mother had determined that her daughter would become “a great woman composer,” and her early years were largely structured by the requisite intense musical training, this despite the fact that, by the time she was a young teenager, she knew that writing called to her in a way that music did not. More, without her mother’s expectations to define her—to make

³⁴ Joyce Johnson, *Minor Characters: A Beat Memoir* (New York: Penguin Books, 1983), 18.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 19-20.

her special—Glassman worried that she would not know who she was. “I knew that my enormous value somehow flowed from her,” she wrote, “Without that flow, I’d be an empty vessel, a cheap trivial item—just a very ordinary person, perhaps.”³⁶

Perhaps it was to subdue these fears of her own potential ordinariness that Glassman began increasingly to seek out the unconventional. As a student at Hunter College High School, she learned of the mythology of Washington Square Park from four slightly older girls, “Trotskyites” with whom she was fascinated. These young women “disdain[ed] the bourgeois cafeteria” of their school, choosing instead to “lunch secretly on yogurt deep in the locker room.” Glassman saw in their “dark clothes and long earrings, the cigarettes they smoke illicitly, the many cups of coffee they say they require to keep them going” the secrets to life itself.³⁷

Life, moreover, came to have a distinct geographical location in Glassman’s mind: not uptown with her parents, but rather downtown in Greenwich Village. The iconic Washington Square arch became not only a geographical marker, but also an “entrance to...lots of other things—perhaps a life of romance and adventure.” She began spending more and more time there, all in pursuit of what she called “Real Life”:

What all this seemed to promise was something I’d never tasted in my life as a child—something I told myself was Real Life. This was not the life my parents lived but one that was dramatic, unpredictable, possibly dangerous. Therefore *real*, infinitely more worth having. In trying to trace the derivations of this notion of experience, I come into blind alleys. It was simply there all of a sudden, full-fledged, like a fever I’d come down with. The air carries ideas like germs, infecting some, not others...Real Life was not to be found in the streets around my house, or anywhere on the Upper West Side, for that matter, or in my school of girls, grubbing joylessly for marks, hysterical about geometry exams and Latin

³⁶ Ibid., 21.

³⁷ Ibid., 26.

homework, flirting ridiculously with the seventy-year-old elevator operator, the only male visible on the premises.³⁸

Interestingly, Glassman believed that Real Life could be attained from the outside in; by donning a different costume, one could *become* a different kind of person.

“Long[ing] to turn” herself “into a Bohemian,” Glassman placed enormous importance on acquiring the proper accessories, a consumerist impulse she later found embarrassing. At thirteen, however, she was not cognizant of the very mainstream ways in which she believed she could attain nonconformity; she was convinced only that the right clothing would function as “a badge, a sign of membership in the ranks of the unconventional...the problem of outside matching inside is so beautifully resolved by this simple means, which only costs money.” Eventually, she did acquire an item, a pair of dangly earrings, that she felt matched the persona she hoped to project. These earrings became a talisman of sorts, constant companions on Glassman’s jaunts between uptown and downtown. “I carry them with me at all times in case I need them,” she noted, “They constitute my downtown disguise.” Although Glassman considered both of her personae—the well-behaved, proper young lady who lived with her parents and the rebellious Village bohemian—to be disguises, only one of these disguises was *real*. The fact that her “downtown disguise” was a costume made it no less real.

Over time, the discrepancy Glassman perceived between her false and real selves and lives became harder to bear. Unlike her friend Maria, whose mother paid little attention to her daughter’s comings and goings, Glassman’s parents enforced a strict curfew. To her thirteen-year-old self, “nothing seemed crueler...I feel I’m missing Everything—whatever Everything it is that happens after seven o’clock.” Like “Real

³⁸ Ibid., 29-30.

Life” “Everything” was important enough to be capitalized. Glassman spent her weekend days in the Village counting down the hours and minutes until she had to return home, increasingly experiencing “an odd state of heightened longing and anxiety.” As the author later explained, “the anxiety is not so much over leaving as over an impending fading of identity.”³⁹ She feared that, returning to her parents’ house, the self she was in the Village would cease to exist. Indeed, it got to the point where, during the school week, Glassman felt as if “we’ve only dreamed that we go to the Village... You can put the Village away like I put away my copper earrings and have problems about things like losing your gym suit on the cross-town bus.”⁴⁰ As literary scholar Ann Douglas noted in her introductory essay to *Minor Characters*, this awareness of duality characterized much of Glassman’s life. As Johnson herself noted, she knew how to “put on a mask... and pass in and out of the straight world.”⁴¹ Douglas saw Glassman’s facility with her shifting identities as a sign not of weakness but of strength, pointing out that “what she conceded on one front she took back on another, veiling, then baring her ‘unacceptable self,’ never ruling out the possibility of motion or adventure.”⁴²

The occasional attempts Glassman made to combine her two lives fell flat. For example, her English teacher, Miss Kirschenbaum, responded to an essay in which Glassman described the “colorful characters” whom she knew through her sojourns to the

³⁹ Johnson , *Minor Characters*, 32.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁴¹ Quoted in Ann Douglas, “Strange Lives, Chosen Lives: The Beat Art of Joyce Johnson,” in *Minor Characters*, xiv.

⁴² *Ibid.*

Village with the admonition that “I should only write about things I knew.”⁴³ Miss Kirschenbaum’s worldview did not allow for unconventionality in either experience or stylistic choices, but she saved her harshest criticism for students who dared turn in assignments that included sentence fragments: “SF! she writes in red in the margins of compositions—SF!! SF!!—routing them out like cockroaches.” What Glassman and her classmates gleaned from this lesson was that writing for “effect”—the only acceptable use of sentence fragments, according to Miss Kirschenbaum—was to remain a bastion of male privilege. Young women, by contrast, had no such license to break the rules (So as not to give her students any ideas, James Joyce, Gertrude Stein, and Virginia Woolf were all *personae non gratae* in Miss Kirschenbaum’s class). “Effect,” Glassman and her classmates learned, “is something we girls have no right to. Only after years of laboriously equipping each sentence with subject and predicate, as with boots and umbrella, can we hope to earn it. Perhaps not even then.”⁴⁴

Glassman entered Barnard College in the fall of 1951, just shy of her sixteenth birthday. Having decided she “was giving up Bohemianism, which I now saw as childish,” she envisioned a new role for herself: the “collegiate.” “I believed,” she wrote, “I was ready for an instant transformation...I did not at all want to be perceived as odd.” Hoping to shed her unconventionality, she imagined instead that she would “go to proms in strapless gowns of pastel tulle, and perhaps even learn to take an interest in football.” Interestingly, Glassman’s ideas for the life she now wished to lead derived from cultural consumption, specifically “the works of F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Mademoiselle* magazine, and

⁴³ Ibid., 42.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 35.

the campus department of Lord and Taylor.” She was determined to build a new self around these images.⁴⁵

Yet, her prior forays into nonconformity followed her, most importantly in the form of writer and classmate Elise Cowen, who, until her suicide in 1962, was one of Glassman’s closest friends. At first, Glassman resisted being friends with Cowen, who came from a family that was wealthier but less stable than her own. To Glassman, Cowen represented everything she was trying to distance herself from in the first months of college life. But Cowen persisted, and it was ultimately she who led Glassman to many of her life’s defining experiences.⁴⁶

It was through Cowen, for example, that Glassman had one of her earliest encounters with Beat culture, although this word suddenly seemed to be everywhere in the fall of 1952: it was that November that John Clellon Holmes’ piece “This Is the Beat Generation” appeared in the *New York Times*. Glassman read the article and reportedly was captivated even then.⁴⁷ Another who was deeply moved by the piece was Glassman’s and Cowen’s married philosophy professor, Alex Greer, with whom the latter had fallen in love and was having an affair.⁴⁸ The previous spring, when Holmes’ novel, *Go*, was released, Greer excitedly shared the book with several of his friends, including Cowen. He had known a few of the characters, each based on a member of Holmes’ circle of friends.⁴⁹ The following spring, one of these figures—Allen Ginsberg—

⁴⁵ Ibid., 47.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 51.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 70-1.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 60-1, 71.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 71.

attended a party at Greer's apartment. Cowen was there, and she quickly fell in love with the poet (although their relationship eventually transcended distinctions between platonic and romantic).⁵⁰

Relatedly, Glassman was also learning that there were serious obstacles to the pursuit of "Real Life." Unlike the bolder Cowen, she did not attend the party at Greer's, nor was she present the evening those gathered smoked marijuana for the first time. Like so many "Real Life" occurrences, Glassman noted that "the marijuana experience was another one I only heard about second hand."⁵¹ She feared she would never "know what life was like. Real life," observing that "my very name seemed a metaphor for what I saw at seventeen as my unique apartness. *Glassman, Glassgirl.*"⁵²

But if Glassman's reserved nature played a role in limiting the experiences to which she had access, her gender did, too. A cruel Barnard writing professor made this perfectly clear; after asking the class full of creative writing majors how many of them wanted to become writers (everyone raised their hands in the affirmative), he issued the following statement, full of "sardonic amusement": "Well, I'm sorry to see this," says Professor X... 'Very sorry. Because'—there's a steel glint in his cold eye—'first of all, if you were going to be writers, you wouldn't be enrolled in this class. You couldn't even be enrolled in school. You'd be hopping freight trains riding through America.'⁵³ The message was clear: only certain experiences—precisely those most difficult for women to gain access to—were useful fodder for creating art.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 73-4.

⁵¹ Ibid., 72.

⁵² Ibid., 69.

⁵³ Ibid., 80-1.

For reasons of personal safety alone, women in 1950s America could rarely hop freight trains. In her introductory essay to *Minor Characters*, for example, literary scholar Ann Douglas noted that in 1951 an eighteen-year-old Sylvia Plath had bemoaned in her journal that, because she was “a girl, a female, always in danger of assault,” she would never realize her “consuming desire to mingle with road crews, sailors, and soldiers, barroom regulars—to be part of a scene, anonymous, listening, recording...to sleep in an open field, to travel west, to walk freely at night.”⁵⁴ Similarly, venturing to the docks to see Jack Kerouac off on a trip to North Africa a few years after having her hopes dashed by Professor X, Glassman realized “that because of my sex I’d probably never see any of this again, and would probably never have seen it at all if it hadn’t been for Jack.”⁵⁵ As the author noted in a new foreword to the memoir written in 1994, “young women found the pursuit of freedom much more complicated.” She herself “didn’t go anywhere. I just left the New York neighborhood where I’d grown up and moved much farther downtown.”⁵⁶ Nor, lacking the generous governmental support that made it possible for so many men to do so, could they choose to leave their paid jobs. Women’s caretaking and domestic responsibilities often similarly precluded such decisions. But men, even countercultural men, did not acknowledge these structural limitations, choosing to see only the perceived lesser authenticity of women’s lives.

Nor were Glassman’s college professors any more receptive than was her high school English teacher to those attempts she did make to convey through writing something of her unconventional life; responding to an exercise noting the sadness of

⁵⁴ Quoted in Douglas, xviii-xix.

⁵⁵ Johnson, *Minor Characters*, 138-9.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, xxxiv.

Cowen's room, Glassman's sophomore-year writing professor (not Professor X) wrote discouragingly, "Don't you get any joy out of life? Think you're a little existentialist or something?"⁵⁷ One can imagine that these professors would have been equally dismissive of a written description of the harrowing experiences Glassman went through in 1956 in order to secure an illegal abortion.⁵⁸ Faced with a similar situation some years earlier, Carolyn Cassady railed against the humiliating hoops women had to jump through. She described

these smug characters you have to go and grovel before, baring your intimate relations and personal habits which we've always been taught are so sacred and private...become a topic of public discussion and a thing to be commercialized and capitalized on by some bunch of rich bastards in the drivers [*sic*] seat. If you catch them in a good mood and a full stomach, they might be "charitable"...if they had a fight with their spouse or a bad lunch they are all righteous and must obey the "laws"...just to realize how hog-tied we all are by such things, how dependent on others and their fancies makes me boil.⁵⁹

Repeating the pattern found in Method acting, self-revelation was significantly less liberating for women than it was for men.

Some men clung so tenaciously to a belief in women's inauthenticity that neither the passage of time nor the interventions of second-wave feminism could shake their faith. Decades after *Go*'s publication, for example, John Clellon Holmes remained a steadfast supporter of the conservative gender politics he had helped to promulgate. As Johnson noted,

Even in 1977, after years of a stable and sustaining second marriage, after all the messages of Women's Liberation that so battered the consciousness of the seventies, Holmes wrote in his preface to a new edition of *Go*: "Did we really resemble these feverish young men, these centerless young women, awkwardly

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 62-3.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 106-10.

⁵⁹ Carolyn Cassady to Neal Cassady, undated [1950], folder 1.10, Neal Cassady Papers.

reaching out for love, for hope, for comprehension, of their lives and times?" And where he scrupulously matches each of the male characters in his roman à clef to their originals, the "girls" are variously "amalgams of several people"; "accurate to the young women of the time"; "a type rather than an individual." He can't quite remember them—they were mere anonymous passengers on the big Greyhound bus of experience. Lacking centers, how could they burn with the fever that infected his young men? What they did, I guess, was fill up the seats.⁶⁰

What Holmes seemed to suggest was that women's perceived lack of a true, core self made them into an amorphous mass, indistinguishable as individuals.

Alex Greer proved to have a larger impact on Glassman's life than on Cowen's, who had first fallen for him. Before the start of her senior year at Barnard, in the summer of 1954, Glassman and Greer embarked on a relationship of their own.⁶¹ To Glassman, it seemed she was "finally" getting the chance to "be the heroine of my own drama."⁶²

Consumed by her relationship with Greer, she gave up composing and paid less attention to her schoolwork, ultimately failing to graduate. Despite this, she easily acquired a secretarial job at a publishing firm.⁶³ In the summer of 1955, she decided to move out of her parents' home, assuming she and Greer would soon be married.⁶⁴ Living on one's own as a single woman in the 1950s inevitably hinted at scandal; as Johnson later noted, "Everyone knew in the 1950s why a girl from a nice family left home. The meaning of her theft of herself from her parents was clear to all—as well as what she'd be up to in that room of her own."⁶⁵ The description here of the decision to live on her own as a

⁶⁰ Johnson, *Minor Characters*, 79.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 92.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 99, 102-3.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 102-3.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 102.

“*theft of herself from her parents*” is particularly intriguing, for it implies not only that young women lacked selves as long as they followed society’s rules, but also that these selves had to be forcibly absconded with. Their existence was not, as was the case with boys, assumed; as Johnson had earlier noted, “I’d learned myself by the age of sixteen that just as girls guarded their virginity, boys guarded something less tangible which they called Themselves.”⁶⁶ While Glassman’s relationship with Greer proved temporary—in April of 1956, he fell in love with another woman⁶⁷—she attempted through her subsequent decisions to make this “theft of herself” into a permanent feature of her life.

In the fall of 1956, Glassman got a new job as a literary agent. At the same time, she was working on the novel she had begun in college.⁶⁸ Through a friend who worked at *Mademoiselle* magazine, which was preparing a story on Jack Kerouac and his circle, she first saw, and was captivated by, a photograph of the author. She borrowed a copy of *The Town and the City*, Kerouac’s first novel, from the office and never brought it back.⁶⁹

Around this same time, Elise Cowen and her girlfriend, a woman named Sheila, moved in with Allen Ginsberg and his longtime partner, poet Peter Orlovsky. Glassman spent a significant amount of time at their apartment, in part hoping she might meet Kerouac. Then, in early 1957, Ginsberg arranged a date for the two of them. Meeting in a diner—Glassman paid, which made her “feel very competent and womanly”—she

⁶⁶ Ibid., 56.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 104-5.

⁶⁸ Her novel was published as *Come and Join the Dance* in 1962.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 117-19.

agreed to let him stay with her, as his romantic entanglements had made his previous living arrangement untenable. The two quickly became romantically involved.⁷⁰

Almost as quickly, Kerouac established the pattern that would characterize their nearly two-year relationship, which was punctuated by the publication of *On the Road* and the author's sudden fame. He spent anywhere from a few days to several weeks in New York, usually staying with Glassman, and then would leave for Tangier, Paris, California, or Florida. Content nowhere, he traveled nearly constantly in the vain hope that a new setting would make him happy. It never did.

Neither, however, was permanence an option. Both domesticity and wage work, which he associated with a settled life, women in general, and Glassman in particular, were anathema to Kerouac. He believed not only that the nature of women's lives made it impossible for them to be true artists, but also that long-term association with a woman would threaten his own artistic production. Women represented precisely the stultifying conformity he was trying to escape. Although Glassman enjoyed the "everydayness" of the time they spent together, characterized by "bacon and eggs in the morning or the middle of the night, which I learned to cook just the way he liked—sunny-side up in the black iron frying pan," she, too, understood that such banal daily rituals were not conducive to the creation of art, trying in vain to convince Kerouac that her life was not guided by convention, that she, too, could go "on the road":

Could he ever include a woman on his journeys? I didn't altogether see why not. When I tried to raise the question, he'd stop me by saying what I really wanted were babies. That was what all women wanted and what I wanted too, even though I said I didn't. Even more than I wanted to be a great woman writer, I wanted to bring life into the world, become a link in the long chain of suffering

⁷⁰ Ibid., 121-31.

and death. I said of course I wanted babies someday, but not for a long time, not now. Wisely, sadly, Jack shook his head.⁷¹

Protest though Glassman might, Kerouac seemed convinced that her life would inevitably be determined by marriage and motherhood, which he perceived as being far narrower experiences than those he sought. Glassman understood and to a certain extent shared these beliefs. Recalling her earlier abortion, for example, she chose not to blame Kerouac for refusing to acknowledge his daughter from his second marriage. “For me, too,” she noted, “freedom and life seemed equivalent.”⁷² Both Kerouac and Glassman believed that their ability to lead unconventional, authentic lives rested on freedom from domestic and familial responsibilities. As discussed in the previous chapter, they also shared this belief with Stella Adler and Betty Friedan.

Kerouac did not perceive these similarities in thought. He thought it inconceivable that women could find conventionality as stifling as did young men. He was wrong. Glassman felt that the exigencies of material survival—her job in a publishing agency—kept her from “real life”: “Office life and real life,” she noted, “had to be kept separate. On weekday mornings, you locked the door on your unacceptable self; you let it out again after five. This was the arrangement by which I knew I had to live.”⁷³ Yet, Glassman’s occasional attempts to abandon this unfulfilling life and join Kerouac in his pursuit of authentic living proved failures. In May 1957 Kerouac made one of his brief trips to New York. He had recently returned from Europe, where he “saw himself imitated, and hated what he saw. These young people...seemed to have the

⁷¹ Ibid., 135.

⁷² Ibid., 136.

⁷³ Ibid., 148.

uniformity of an army,” and planned within a few days to leave for Florida, where he would collect his mother and take her to California, staying there until returning north for *On the Road*'s publication in the fall.⁷⁴ Smitten, Glassman suggested that she quit her job and go to California with him, but he would not commit one way or the other, telling her only to “do what you want.”⁷⁵ Although undeterred by his distinct lack of enthusiasm, Glassman was unable to make plans to join Kerouac in California before he grew disillusioned with his life there, citing its “Total Police Authority” and pervasive “negative oldwoman attitude.”⁷⁶ Then, shortly after learning that Random House wanted to publish her novel and mere days after receiving a promotion from secretary to editorial assistant at Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, she received a letter from Kerouac inviting her to join him in Mexico. She quit her job immediately and began making travel arrangements, but by the time she was to depart, Kerouac had returned to Florida.⁷⁷

Returning to full-time secretarial work after spending the advance Random House had given her for the completion of her novel, she feared that the narrowness of her own experiences was affecting the significance of her writing. Long intent on writing as honestly as possible, she struggled to heed Kerouac's advice not to edit her prose,⁷⁸ even wondering if, in comparison to his life, her own experiences deserved to be written about:

“My little secretary,” Jack kept calling me in his letters. “With the long black stockings.” How Beat could I actually be, holding down a steady office job and writing a novel about an ivy-league college girl on the verge of parting with her virginity? “If I had to go and apply for jobs like you, they'd have to drag me into

⁷⁴ Ibid., 152-3.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 154.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 165-7.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 172-3, 178-9.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 148.

Bellevue in two days,” he wrote. “That’s why I am and always will be a bum, a dharma bum, a rucksack wanderer.” Maybe Professor X hadn’t been wrong when he said real writers would be out hopping freight trains.⁷⁹

By this logic, of course, a “real writer,” as Johnson would be quick to point out, could almost without exception only be a male writer. As she noted years later, as far as Beats were concerned, “a steady gig... was valued chiefly as a means of getting unemployment insurance. The great accomplishment was to avoid actual employment for as long as possible and by whatever means. But it was all right for women to go out and earn wages, since they had no creative endeavors to be distracted from. The women didn’t mind, or, if they did, they never said—not until years later.”⁸⁰ As she herself noted years later, “he [Kerouac] kept trying, exhorting me to take more chances, to go out—he felt I should follow his path—go out in the world, not be tied down to a little secretarial job, and, you know, have the kind of life he had. Of course, that was impossible... for me.”⁸¹

The sudden fame that was thrust on Kerouac with the publication of *On the Road* exacerbated his mercurial tendencies. Increasingly drunk, even at public appearances, he found it even more difficult than before to stay in one place or to be around people other than his mother for very long.⁸² Returning to New York for a series of readings in early 1958, he deviated from his pattern of staying with Glassman, citing her stifling affections and perceived attempts to domesticate him. As he put it in a letter, “Lissen Joyce... I don’t want to importune you any further because as I told you I’m an Armenian and I

⁷⁹ Ibid., 205.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 207.

⁸¹ Joyce Johnson, interview with Nancy M. Grace, October 2, 2002, in Nancy M. Grace and Ronna C. Johnson, eds., *Breaking the Rules of Cool: Interviewing and Reading Women Beat Writers* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004), 197.

⁸² Johnson, *Minor Characters*, 189-92.

don't wanta get married till I'm 69 and have 69 gentle grandninnies. Please don't be mad at me, I wanta be alone, Greta Garbo.”⁸³ He assumed that, because she was a woman, marriage and children must be Glassman's only desires.

Perhaps unintentionally, however, Kerouac's indulgences inevitably cast Glassman in a maternal role. The night he invited her to one of his readings, he was so drunk and disoriented that he seemed not to know where he was or why he was there. Glassman brought him back to his hotel room, and a few days later he moved back in with her. The dysfunctional alternate domesticity that ensued was indicative of Kerouac's emotional state; Glassman would leave for work in the morning only to return at the end of the day to find him sitting in darkness.⁸⁴

Severely unhappy, he continued his peripatetic lifestyle with trips between Florida and New York, eventually deciding on a whim after being injured in a bar fight to buy a house for himself and his mother in North Port, Long Island.⁸⁵ There, he continued his retreat from the world; Glassman's one visit did not go well, and he asked her not to return.⁸⁶ Then, in the midst of an argument on a city street in the fall of 1958, the two ended their relationship for good.⁸⁷

From the distance of several decades, Joyce Glassman Johnson did not sugarcoat this time in her life, but she did apotheosize it as her most important period. Glossing over subsequent events in her own life—including Elise Cowen's suicide, her father's

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 221.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 221-3.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 245-6.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 250.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 253.

and husband's deaths, and the publication of her novel—she devoted much of her memoir's last movement to parsing the significance of her relationship with Beat culture. She was, first, certainly aware of the gender politics of this movement occupying “the exact center of the universe, that midnight place where so much is converging, the only place in America that's alive.” Looking back on her own involvement, she noted that

as a female, she's not quite part of this convergence. A fact she ignores, sitting by in her excitement as the voices of the men, always the men, passionately rise and fall and their beer glasses collect and the smoke of their cigarettes rises toward the ceiling and the dead culture is surely being wakened. Merely being there, she tells herself, is enough.⁸⁸

As she also noted in the 1994 foreword, she had been “much more of an observer than I wanted to be.”⁸⁹ But it was not her position as a spectator that bothered her most; at the time she had been largely content to have “a seat at the table.”⁹⁰ Rather, she was disappointed that male Beats seemed to associate women with the repressive, conformist society they were trying to escape. Commenting on the film *Pull My Daisy*, Kerouac's fictionalized account of his friends' real-life experiences, Johnson noted, “it's too bad the women are all portrayed as spoilsports,” keeping their male counterparts from the pursuit of authentic living. As an adult, she associated their antics with “the right to remain children.”⁹¹

⁸⁸ Ibid., 261-2.

⁸⁹ Ibid., xxxiv.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 261.

⁹¹ Ibid., 260-1.

Interestingly, though, despite the pride she felt in having done “a lot of New Left publishing”⁹² later in life, Johnson also drew stark distinctions between the 1950s and the 1960s, attributing a greater authenticity to the former. In part, she attributed this to the more repressive nature of the immediate postwar era, noting that “repression breeds intensity. For me, the late Fifties had a special intensity that has never been equaled since.”⁹³ By contrast, she felt that the relative openness of the 1960s bred a diffuse complacency. “The sixties,” Johnson wrote, “seemed anticlimactic, for all their fireworks. Some culmination had been short-circuited. I saw hippies replace beatniks, sociologists replace poets, the empty canvas replace the Kline. Unenthusiastically, I observed the emergence of ‘lifestyle.’ The old intensities were blanding out into ‘Do your own thing’—the commandment of a freedom excised of struggle.” As Johnson saw it, her generation’s desperate attempts to escape the repressive conformity of the 1950s had been replaced by the 1960s by a complacent, individualistic ethos focused solely on personal fulfillment. This complacency, ironically, was accompanied by a rigid dogmatism; had the revolution promised by the upheavals of the 1960s come, Johnson noted, “there would have been no room in its orthodoxies for a Kerouac.”⁹⁴ She perceived her own relationship to the 1960s feminist movement in the same way, noting in 1999 that “the orthodoxy of the women’s movement...really began to get me down.” She went so far as to compare *Ms.* founder Gloria Steinem to a member of the “Thought

⁹² Johnson, interview with Nancy M. Grace, October 3, 2002, 202.

⁹³ Johnson, *Minor Characters*, xxxiv.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 261.

Police.”⁹⁵ As later chapters will discuss, however, 1960s activists themselves claimed they were trying to escape all orthodoxies.

Containing little of the ambivalence of Johnson’s own writing, literary scholar Ann Douglas’ 1999 introductory essay to *Minor Characters* stressed almost without exception the liberating aspects of Glassman’s, and by extension other women’s, association with Beat culture. The essay based its argument on an observation made by Joyce Johnson that same year: “Most of [the Beat women],” she noted, “never got the chance literally to go on the road. Our road instead became the strange lives we were leading. We had actually *chosen* these lives.”⁹⁶ In this view, all that was needed to break free from the perceived narrowness of conventional lives was a particularly strong will.

Importantly, Douglas connected Glassman’s aesthetic philosophy, and Beat culture more generally, to both analogous cultural developments and the seemingly unrelated political milieu from which they emerged. As a child, Glassman had a brief stint as an actress, performing on Broadway in 1944’s *I Remember Mama*, best-known today as Marlon Brando’s Broadway debut. Not content heeding her stage directions to sit quietly, Glassman improvised movements that she thought better captured how a real child would behave in such circumstances. As Douglas noted, “though she wouldn’t have known it at the time, Johnson’s resistance to regimentation, her reenactment of the mobility of actual experience, echoed the spirit of Brando’s new naturalistic, ‘living on the stage’ Method acting and prefigured her own career as a Beat writer in the troubled,

⁹⁵ Johnson, interview with Nancy M. Grace, May 15, 1999, 192.

⁹⁶ Douglas, xiii.

romantic explosion of American cultural life in the post-World War II decades.”⁹⁷ In the quest for authenticity that characterized both Method acting and Beat writing, Douglas argued,

the Beats’ primary purpose was to eliminate, by whatever method, the false note, the borrowed tone. As writers, what they shared was an insistence on immediate experience; a constant, palpably autobiographical focus, a distrust of conventional collective solutions, a keen comic eye for the incongruous and absurd, a restless push toward the Third World margins and urban back lots of industrial civilization, and a style intimately entangled with the arts of memory, honest at all costs, always alert to the funny, sad rhythms of the particular body moving through the strangeness of space and time.⁹⁸

Such developments, moreover, did not occur in a vacuum; rather, Douglas argued that “such [rebel] artists were invaluable for cold war propaganda purposes...American rebels were living proof that, in contrast to the heavily regimented Soviet Union, creative individualism in extremis was allowed, even feted, in the United States...Rebellious males provided a much needed antidote to the...new postwar types that commentators William H. Whyte, Jr., C. Wright Mills, and David Riesman described and deplored in much-noticed sociological studies of the early and mid-1950s.”⁹⁹

Douglas’ insights provide important support for part of the larger argument my project advances, but they also invite a careful look at both the gendered assumptions underlying such anxieties and their implications for the emergence and shape of second-wave feminism. Certainly Douglas acknowledged the sexism inherent in Beat culture, which, “like the Actors Studio, bebop, and abstract expressionism,” functioned as “an intensely charismatic effort to transform and masculinize American cultural expression

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid., xviii.

⁹⁹ Ibid., xxvi.

just after World War II.”¹⁰⁰ Nor did she pretend that women were allowed to be full participants in these movements, noting Johnson’s sadness at “the silence imposed on Beat women.”¹⁰¹ Yet, Douglas was quick to disassociate herself from those feminist critics who have cast Beat men as villains by overemphasizing the importance of their “sometimes openly misogynist ethos,”¹⁰² arguing instead with Barbara Ehrenreich that “the male Beats provided an example of liberation for the feminists of the next generation, and *Minor Characters* tells us how a number of Beat women found themselves in each other, discovering in the cultural ground their male peers cleared the space for their own self-expression.”¹⁰³ While Joyce Glassman may have been silent, her memoir “never for a moment... suggest[ed] that any other cultural site could have offered her as much stimulation, or that silence precluded a different form of participation.”¹⁰⁴ Indeed, Douglas argued that this enforced silence, because of the anger and frustration it caused, could actually spur on rather than retard the development of a feminist consciousness.¹⁰⁵

Douglas also held up as salutary Beat men’s deviations from the male breadwinner-female homemaker model, taking other feminist critics to task for neither acknowledging nor celebrating the fact that “Beats dismantled conventional ideas of masculinity, disavowing the roles of breadwinner, husband, and father and incorporating

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., xiv.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., xv.

¹⁰² Ibid., xiv.

¹⁰³ Ibid., xvi.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., xv.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., xv-xvi.

homosexual, even ‘feminine’ traits into the masculine ideal.”¹⁰⁶ More, she argued, “the woman writer who actually lived, as Johnson intermittently did, with a male Beat discovered that, since he fulfilled few, if any, of the conventional demands of his masculine role, she was sometimes freed from the small, incessant acts of subordination that then compromised daily life for a woman in a more traditional couple.” But while certainly the importance of economic independence to women cannot be underestimated, holding up wage work as the key to liberation belies adherence to a very narrow model of feminism while simultaneously obscuring the governmental support so many male Beats received. Women who lived with male Beats also found that their decision to eschew the breadwinner role did not mean that they were willing to take more responsibility for the domestic labor generally relegated to women. More, this perspective does not recognize that, to male Beats, women’s perceived artistic inferiority was predicated precisely on how bound up their lives were in material concerns, including *both* wage work *and* unpaid domestic labor.

More important to Douglas than these renegotiations of who was to sustain material survival was the abstract concept of “self-expression,” or even, in a slightly different vein, the ability to control one’s own life and choose one’s own identity. Douglas offered several examples of how *On the Road* led young women to make concrete changes in their own lives:

On the Road electrified young women as well as men. The poet Janine Pommy Vega, then fifteen, who found in Kerouac’s novel “the intensity that was missing in my life,” set out for New York, where she met Ginsberg, Huncke, and Peter Orlovsky. The words of *On the Road* shot through Marilyn Coffee, later a feminist activist, “like a fusillade of bullets.” After buying some candles and wine, she began to write, feeling “free to say anything I wanted...the equal of any

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., xiv.

man.” The teenage Janis Joplin, starving for companionship in Port Arthur, Texas, first read about Kerouac in *Time* magazine. “I said ‘Wow!’ and split.”¹⁰⁷

As Douglas concluded, “if feminism means the insistence on a woman’s right to full, independent, and original life, *On the Road* served in these instances as its catalyst.”¹⁰⁸

To me, the most important connection between Beat writing and women’s liberation lies in how the women in each movement insisted that their individual truths—not just those of their male counterparts—were legitimate sources of knowledge about the world. In each group, men held to an understanding of authenticity that granted ultimate authority to the wisdom gleaned from the self, its emotions, and experiences. Yet, in each case, they extended this privilege only to other men. In response, women fought tooth and nail to have their own voices heard, insisting that the truths determined by their experiences were just as important as men’s. In this way, the Beat movement functioned as a rehearsal for the showdown between male SDS members and women’s liberationists over an emotion- and experience-based politics.

Hettie Jones’s 1990 memoir, *How I Became Hettie Jones*, depicts the author’s struggle to voice her authentic self. As literary scholar Barrett Watten has argued, she experienced “deep concerns with the coherence of her own identity.”¹⁰⁹ Beginning with a title that suggests the interesting idea of “becoming” oneself, even her opening epigram, taken from Jane Bowles’s 1943 novel about female independence, suggests the instability of identity: “The idea...is to change first of our own volition and according to our own

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., xiv-xv.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., xv.

¹⁰⁹ Barrett Watten, “What I See in *How I Became Hettie Jones*,” in Ronna C. Johnson and Nancy M. Grace, eds., *Girls Who Wore Black: Women Writing the Beat Generation* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 97.

inner promptings before they impose completely arbitrary changes on us.”¹¹⁰ Women, that is, should not rely on others to determine or define the changing nature of identity but rather should take control of the process themselves. Jones, however, found that she often had trouble following this dictum.

Born in 1934, Hettie Cohen grew up in a middle-class Jewish family in Queens, New York. Her father owned a family printing press, while her mother devoted herself to volunteer work. Cohen chafed under the restrictions of a female childhood, which she felt conflicted with her desire to become an autonomous agent in control of her own life. “By 1951,” she wrote, “the year we were labeled the Silent Generation, I’d been recommended to silence often. Men had little use for an outspoken woman, I’d been warned. What I wanted, I was told, was security and upward mobility, which might be mine if I learned to shut my mouth.”¹¹¹ The young Cohen had no use for such social conventions. “I never had ‘normal’ fifties plans,” she insisted, “they seemed preposterous.”¹¹² She refused to follow the example of Marjorie Morningstar, the protagonist of Herman Wouk’s eponymous novel, who gave up a bohemian, artistic life for marriage and the suburbs. As both Hettie Jones and Joyce Johnson noted, men were quick to hold this example over the heads of any young woman who professed to reject a conventional lifestyle. As the latter put it, “ambitious young men of the fifties, struggling to reconcile the clamoring of their libidos with their search for appropriate wives, often invoked the wayward Jewish princess of Herman Wouk’s best seller. If you had certain

¹¹⁰ Jane Bowles, *Two Serious Ladies*, quoted in Hettie Jones, *How I Became Hettie Jones* (New York: Grove Press, 1990), 3.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 23.

unorthodox interests, such a young man might employ his full range of debating skills to argue you out of them, prove they were inauthentic.”¹¹³ Cohen, however, hoped to pursue an independent existence in which no one but herself controlled who she was: “Myself I simply expected, by force of will, to assume a new shape in the future. Unlike any woman in my family or anyone I’d ever actually known, I was going to *become*—something, anything, whatever that meant.”¹¹⁴ In this view, women who lived conventional lives were deprived not only of a meaningful existence, but of a very identity. The mandate “to become something” rested on the assumption that the given state of women’s lives was not to be anything at all. It was only through sheer “force of will” that exceptional young women could challenge and overcome this natural state. That is, Cohen believed that she had the ability to break free from years of social training to become an autonomous individual if only she wanted it badly enough. Later experiences, however, challenged this thinking.

As a drama major at Mary Washington College, then the women’s college of the University of Virginia, Cohen put on and took off other people’s identities, a practice that seems to have seeped into how she thought about herself in real life. Much of this ambiguity was related to Cohen’s feelings about her Jewishness, which she felt made her simultaneously not-white and not-not-white. Interestingly, it was an experience with blackness that cemented her feelings on the matter. The summer after graduating from college, Cohen had a job traveling throughout rural Virginia selling electric fans. One day, a young African-American girl pulled Cohen by the hand into her house. As the author related it years later, this simple act of touch was a revelation:

¹¹³ Johnson, *Minor Characters*, 214.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

It's strange, now, to consider what that hand may have meant. As an outsider Jew I could have tried for white, aspired to the liberal intellectual, potentially conservative Western tradition. But I never was drawn to that history, and with so little specific to call my own I felt free to choose. Maybe all the small brown hands I've held since then are descended from hers.¹¹⁵

Jones asserted that it was precisely the tenuousness of being Jewish in America—not this, but not that, either—that left her free to choose her own identity. Moreover, it was an encounter with blackness that led her to this realization. Although Jones always insisted that she was troubled by the romanticization of African-American experience, particularly in the popularity of jazz, it was still an encounter with an African-American child that led her to believe in the possibility of self-fashioning. She presented the touch of an African-American child's hand as a step along the path “to become something.” It is also telling that Jones read onto this early encounter her later experiences, suggesting that even her marriage was the result of this chance encounter.

As Joyce Johnson, who in the late 1950s would become one of Hettie Jones's closest friends, argued, the young Hettie Cohen was a person in search of “real life,” something she most decidedly did not find in her middle-class home that was “as devoid of books and music as it was of dust.”¹¹⁶ Indeed, Jones noted that “there were only a couple of books in our house; he'd [her father] never read them or any others and wouldn't. Once, catching me at it, he pointed to the pages in my hand and said, ‘You won't find life there.’”¹¹⁷ Cohen's parents sent her to college to attain “Culture,” to borrow Johnson's ironic capitalization, but their tastes lay squarely in the middlebrow world of “*Swan Lake*, *My Fair Lady*, a yearly membership in the Book-of-the-Month

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 14.

¹¹⁶ Johnson, *Minor Characters*, 214.

¹¹⁷ Jones, 8-9.

Club.”¹¹⁸ Cohen’s decision to attend Mary Washington College, as both she and Johnson framed it, was one informed by her need to get “away from the usual expectations.”¹¹⁹ Johnson even argued that Cohen’s decision to become a drama major was an attempt to get closer to “real life.” As she put it, “for some young girls, the desire to be on stage is really the desire to be in life, to escape from the everyday into something larger, more demanding.”¹²⁰ Like Stella Adler, Johnson implied, Cohen found the theatre more *real* than everyday life.

If a chance encounter with a young African-American girl led Hettie Cohen down the path toward becoming an unconventional person, an equally accidental meeting also led directly to her marriage. In the years after college, Cohen worked a variety of jobs. The most consequential turned out to be at the *Record Changer*, the record collectors’ magazine at which she was the Subscription Manager. It was there that she met LeRoi Jones (later Amiri Baraka), who was hired as the Shipping Manager. First friends, the two soon became romantically involved and, in 1958, married.¹²¹

Hettie Jones portrayed her relationship with LeRoi Jones as one in which authenticity was frequently debated. Implicating his own middle-class family, for example, he informed Hettie Cohen that “the Negro middle class is a bunch of imitation ofays... You need to read about that.” He recommended that she read E. Franklin

¹¹⁸ Johnson, *Minor Characters*, 213-14.

¹¹⁹ Jones, 10.

¹²⁰ Johnson, *Minor Characters*, 214.

¹²¹ In a section that deals with naming and identity, what to call the major figures takes on added significance. As much as possible, I try to refer to LeRoi and Hettie Jones as they self-identified at the time being described. This means that LeRoi Jones is referred to as such, since he did not adopt the name Amiri Baraka until after his marriage with Hettie Jones ended. For clarity’s sake, I at times find it necessary to refer to the two by their respective first names, although I am aware of the politically problematic decision to do so.

Frazier's *The Black Bourgeoisie*, which had just come out in English. What Jones and Frazier argued was that, in their attempts to imitate whites, middle-class African Americans had abandoned their own identities.¹²²

Despite Joyce Johnson's assertion that, "for Hettie, black came to seem the color of a great deal more that was realer than what she'd known, some purer definition of experience, some essential knowledge that the white suburbs denied their children,"¹²³ Jones always insisted that it was *not* the perceived authenticity of blackness that drew her to bohemianism in general or LeRoi in particular. "This long romance with 'Negro life,' or 'way of life,' troubled me. After the shacks I'd seen in the South I refused to link hard life with art; at least I wasn't convinced that the latter required the former."¹²⁴ She never related to Norman Mailer's infamous argument in his 1957 essay "The White Negro" that white hipsters were attracted to "the black world's sexy, existential violence," arguing instead that she liked jazz solely for the music.¹²⁵

Hettie Jones's life provides an opportunity to explore the nature of choice and self-fashioning, especially as they relate to assigned or chosen names. In the process of "becoming Hettie Jones" (exchanging her birth name for her married name), the author feared that she had lost her own identity. Here, gender and race were intertwined. It was not just that, as a woman, she felt her identity subsumed by a man's, but rather that LeRoi's greater experience with discrimination meant that she would need to trust his choices. Hettie first realized this as she and LeRoi walked down the streets of New York

¹²² Ibid., 28.

¹²³ Johnson, *Minor Characters*, 215.

¹²⁴ Jones 23.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 35.

City and were faced with rude comments and threats from passersby. While Hettie wanted to respond, LeRoi told her to ignore it and keep walking. Although reluctant, she kept quiet, and eventually she acknowledged that he was right. It was, she wrote, “only later that I realized we might have been hurt, or *killed*—and him more likely—had we been out of New York City. My ignorance embarrassed me.” Yet, she was equally troubled by the acquiescence this situation required. “To live like this,” she wrote—indeed, to survive—“I would have to defer to his judgment.” As she went on to describe,

This gave me some pause. I am not by nature obedient. I began to have moments where I felt we ought not to mess up each other’s lives. I knew my family would be troublesome. Mostly I was haunted by the problem of remaining a Jew, but I didn’t know how to reinvent a Jewish woman who wasn’t a Jewish wife. “I think I am losing my Jewishness,” I wrote in my journal, and then, “Grr...what is that?”

Cut off from both her cultural heritage and her own sense of self, Jones feared that the exigencies of mere survival in an interracial relationship necessitated giving up her belief that she was an autonomous individual in control of her own destiny. While a full exploration of LeRoi Jones’s decision to adopt the name Amiri Baraka lies outside the thematic and chronological scope of this project, it is certainly worth mentioning that, while Hettie felt that changing her name left her cut off from her true self, her ex-husband felt that he found himself by doing the same thing, suggesting a complex interplay of gender and race in the realms of identity, naming, and self-fashioning. Joyce Johnson even interpreted LeRoi’s earlier decision to drop his original first name, Everett, as a sign of his “far-reaching aspirations.”¹²⁶ As Barrett Watten has argued, “Hettie Cohen did not become Hettie Jones in the same way that LeRoi Jones became Amiri Baraka, even as the

¹²⁶ Johnson, 215.

two transformations are linked.”¹²⁷ When LeRoi Jones changed his name, he reclaimed a part of himself that had been lost through centuries of racist exploitation; when Hettie Cohen changed her name, she did so in a way that subordinated her identity to her husband’s.

Like many of her fellow memoir writers, Jones’s experiences of being attached to a promising male writer were less than ideal. Like Joyce Johnson and Carolyn Cassady, not to mention countless less-famous women, she had to navigate the often humiliating steps needed to secure an illegal abortion. First becoming pregnant before she and LeRoi were married, she traveled by herself to see a doctor in Pennsylvania. Not only did she feel that the pregnancy was her fault and thus her responsibility alone, but also she feared the treatment LeRoi would receive were they seen together on the road. As Hettie soon discovered, however, her location made her intentions clear. The morning after the procedure, while waiting for the bus outside of the doctor’s office, a man driving by shouted out to her, “Oh, you must have been a *bad girl!*”¹²⁸ This was not her last encounter with reproductive politics. After returning to New York and recovering from the abortion, she put on a fake wedding ring and secured a diaphragm from the Margaret Sanger Clinic, where a staff member frowned in disapproval upon learning that Cohen’s “husband” was black.¹²⁹ When Hettie became pregnant again, she and LeRoi decided to get married, much to her parents’ chagrin. Her father went so far as to suggest that she secure a divorce and a second abortion.¹³⁰ According to Diane DiPrima, Hettie had been

¹²⁷ Watten, 100.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 61-4.

considering getting pregnant intentionally to “force” LeRoi to marry her, although, given her earlier abortion and the discord surrounding her second pregnancy, this seems unlikely.¹³¹

Once married, Hettie had to deal simultaneously with LeRoi’s infidelities and his jealousy. While she chose outwardly to accept his affair with her friend Diane DiPrima, he had no such tolerance for her extracurricular activities, ranging from innocent dance classes to an affair of her own. His discovery of the latter led not only to name-calling—in his view, the infidelity made her a “whore” and a “bitch”—but also to a frightening instance of domestic violence, when he slapped her head into the wall of their apartment.¹³² Later, a fight over LeRoi’s flirtations with other women led to a separation between the two. They temporarily reunited before an eventual divorce.¹³³

Like Joyce Johnson and the fictional women of John Clellon Holmes’s Beat novel *Go*, Hettie Jones was also compelled to continue participating in wage work while her male counterpart was free to pursue his art. Early in her relationship with LeRoi, with *Record Changer* in financial trouble and likely to shut down, Hettie found a new job as subscription manager for the *Partisan Review*, where she stayed in various positions for several years.¹³⁴ Although allowing her temporarily to work part-time after her first child was born, the magazine eventually told Hettie that she either needed to work full-time or not at all. With LeRoi’s career progressing, in part due to Hettie’s help in getting him published in *Partisan Review*, Hettie could not imagine asking him to give up his writing

¹³¹ Diane DiPrima, *Recollections of My Life as a Woman: The New York Years* (New York: Viking, 2001), 218.

¹³² Jones, 103-4.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 138.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 42-3.

to take a full-time job himself. Although race complicated this common narrative of a woman working for wages to support her artistic husband—being able to support his family was a point of pride for LeRoi—the same arrangement eventually won out. Hettie, meanwhile, added another layer of significance to her decision to continue working for wages; she hoped to protect not only LeRoi’s career, but also her own independence. “I understand,” she wrote, “...that for me everything is different than for him, even dependency a different risk. To one of us a job is a slave, to the other it’s a guarantee of freedom. And it’s his male pride, with all that this entails, against my freedom to take it or leave it. He has lots of ways to make his side up, but I can only lose mine once. And I won’t.”¹³⁵ When her second child was born in 1961, the hospital social worker was shocked to discover that Hettie was the sole family breadwinner and that no family member was working for wages while she remained under doctor’s care.¹³⁶

In the meantime, Hettie felt frustrated with her own writing. As her friendship with Joyce Johnson developed in the late 1950s, each was jealous of what the other had. As Johnson put it, “whenever I looked at young Bohemian couples like Roi and Hettie, I’d wish I too were anchored to someone.”¹³⁷ Her romantic relationship with Kerouac had ended by that point. Jones, meanwhile, was puzzled by Johnson’s jealousy. “She thought I was lucky to be with Roi,” she mused, “But she was writing—a novel, already under contract—and that was her good fortune, I thought.”¹³⁸ Hettie’s life, by contrast, was dominated by wage work, housework, and childcare, which left little time or energy

¹³⁵ Ibid., 123.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 178.

¹³⁷ Johnson, *Minor Characters*, 219.

¹³⁸ Jones, 81.

to write. With food put away, laundry folded, occasional vomit cleaned up, and children asleep, she was left with the question of “where to go, after all that? Certainly not to writing that makes any further demands on feeling, which requires strength as well as time.” Moreover, she felt that these tasks provided no usable material on which to draw artistically. “I didn’t *mind* my household life,” she wrote, “I just couldn’t do a damn thing with it. How did it translate to words, this holding pattern of call and response, clean and dirty, sick, well, asleep, awake.” She did now know how the realities of a woman’s life—the neverending cycle of domestic labor and caring for others—could be turned into meaningful art. “In the nineteenth century,” she noted, “[transcendentalist Ralph Waldo] Emerson called on women to write ‘the meaning of a household life.’ I found that goal elusive a century later.”¹³⁹ However, she *was* writing poems, many of which, despite her claim that “most weren’t good enough” to show anyone, *did* deal quite powerfully with the realities of women’s domestic and caretaking responsibilities.

Witnessing a young mother whose infant child vomited on her coat while on the bus, Jones imagined what the rest of this woman’s day would be like based on her own similar experiences. Jones followed her subject from the bus to the subway, where she “stares / out the window / over the head / of the sleeping baby / She is twenty-seven / and very tired / Let me always / support her / Having been her / befriend her.”¹⁴⁰ Significantly, the last poem she wrote before LeRoi asked her for a divorce focused on the unequal household labor performed by men and women: “My dearest darling / will you take out / the garbage, the fish heads / the cats / wouldn’t eat / the children are sleeping / I cannot

¹³⁹ Ibid., 182-3.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 186.

hear them breathing / Will you be my friend / and protector from all evil / the dead fish / take them away / please.”

Being a woman and a mother, she felt, forced her to miss out on other developments, as well. An artists’ softball league of which LeRoi was a part relegated wives, girlfriends, and female friends to cheering from the sidelines.¹⁴¹ More seriously, at a Fair Play for Cuba Committee protest on February 16, 1961, a police officer told Hettie that she couldn’t walk around with a baby in a stroller because it was unsafe, again forcing her to watch rather than actively participate. “Years later,” she wrote, “at all the Vietnam War protests, where babies were such a common sight, I’d remember my angry frustration that day, parked on a bench, with my bewildered daughter in her stroller, watching everyone else march around us.”¹⁴² In the more restrictive world of the early 1960s, the realities of women’s lives were not easily reconciled with political activism.

In the midst of these developments, Hettie became more and more convinced that, rather than “becoming” something, she had lost herself. She recalled one particular, seemingly trivial incident that made this loss painfully obvious. One day in the early 1960s, she received a call at *Partisan Review* from a bill collector for the phone company, which was looking for payment from Hettie *Cohen* for calls she had placed to LeRoi while he was visiting Cuba. Lacking the money to pay these exorbitant fees, Hettie decided that “it was convenient—no, necessary—to ditch her” former, single self. “I didn’t think she’d mind,” she wrote, “after two years I was used to being called Jones, and was listed that way on the *Partisan* masthead.” Still, despite the equanimity with

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 100-1.

¹⁴² Ibid., 134.

which she had traded Cohen for Jones upon her marriage, the incident with the phone company affected her deeply:

...when the bill collector called my office, looking for in-debt Miss Cohen, I had to be the one to tell him. “No, she’s no longer with us,” I said coolly. “Yes, she did work here, but I don’t know where she is now.” For a moment—the words out and gone—I felt a terrible loss, as if I’d dismissed an old friend. But it was done; that was it for Hettie Cohen. I hung up and called home, and Roi made a big, comforting joke about her departure... Still the incident nagged me. Poor discarded Hettie Cohen. With all her grand ambition, all she’d ever “become” was Hettie Jones.¹⁴³

Feeling that she owed something to her former self, Hettie felt compelled to buy her a proper desk conducive to writing.

The incident with the phone company was not the only time LeRoi attempted to salvage Hettie’s sense of self. In 1962, for the last issue of their short-lived literary magazine *Yugen*, he identified her for the first time as “H. Cohen-Jones.” “I liked it,” she wrote, “it was funny to have the least aristocratic hyphenated name in America, although the up-front initial, H, somehow left out the woman whose mouth I was trying to open.”¹⁴⁴ Reconnecting with one part of her identity, she nonetheless felt that another part had been taken away. This new identity, she felt, silenced precisely the part of her that was female.

Moreover, she could not escape the feeling that her marriage was one of the reasons she felt so self-less. That same year, she described in her journal LeRoi’s most recent affair, devoting an entire paragraph to the decision to “let him.” As Hettie remarked decades later, “the person who wrote this? Who gave those last two words their own paragraph? I recognize her, a little. To be always chasing him only meant less

¹⁴³ Ibid., 115-16.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 168.

time for her, and of the two, she was the more elusive.”¹⁴⁵ In other words, the more she held onto LeRoi, the more she had to let go of Hettie. She also felt that being in an interracial relationship in a virulently racist world had complicated her understanding of her own identity. She felt so connected to her husband and children that, by herself in groups consisting only of white people, she felt that part of her was missing. “In a midtown office by himself,” she wrote, “Roi could only be himself. In a similar situation, without him or the children, I felt misrepresented, minus a crucial dimension, and seeing race prejudice everywhere, shocking and painful.” Race and racism added another dimension to the process by which women understood their own identities in relation to their families. Hettie identified with the feeling described by Diana Powell, a white woman who had also married a black man, of being “disguised in your own skin.”¹⁴⁶ Yet, there is something troubling in Hettie’s insistence that, while whiteness was unstable, contingent, and contextual, blackness was stable, eternal, always itself.

Learning to live without LeRoi after he asked for a divorce, however, Hettie discovered that she had never truly been lost after all. Both her father and her husband, the two men from whom her names came, “first loved me for myself, and then discarded me when that self no longer fit their daughter/wife image. If I hadn’t been myself all along I might have been left next to nothing.”¹⁴⁷ Indeed, she ended her memoir on a note that was hopeful precisely because it functioned as a reassertion of her own unique, relatively stable identity. Walking past a nursery school in the winter of 1973, several years after most of the events described above,

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 167-8.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 202.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 216.

...One of the teachers turned and looked out at me as I passed along Second Avenue.

I remembered him. He'd clerked in the old Eighth Street Bookshop.

He wanted to recognize me, too, though it was hard to get past my intent withdrawal. He came to the fence politely. "Are you..." he asked, and I waited, caught.

"Are you still..." he tried again. By this time I knew what he was thinking, it wasn't an unfamiliar scene. He was searching out a name for me and rejecting all the choices. Is she Cohen? No, she was Jones. Is she yet that, or is the name removed like the man from whom she got it?

I smiled. I'd help if I could.

But then he came out with it, what he'd decided to ask—and it was a smash!

"Are you still...Hettie?" he said.

"By all means," I said laughing. By all means.¹⁴⁸

Ultimately, then, buried beneath attachments formed and abandoned, the kernel of a stable, authentic identity resided, and the author was eventually able to "become" who she truly was.

Like the young Hettie Cohen, fellow writer Diane DiPrima found the expectations of conventional femininity unappealing, restrictive, and, ultimately, incompatible with living an artistic life. In fact, she framed the life of the artist in part as an escape from such gendered expectations. Born in 1934 in New York City, DiPrima learned early on from her Italian-American family that "it was women...who attended on all the practical aspects of life."¹⁴⁹ Men may have been free to live in the world of ideas, but women always made sure there was food on the table. The relationship between DiPrima's grandparents, Antoinette and Domenico Mallozi, provided a first and most lasting example of this dichotomy.

DiPrima had a great deal of respect for her grandfather, a labor organizer and political activist who occasionally brought his young granddaughter to hear him speak at

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 238-9.

¹⁴⁹ DiPrima, 1.

rallies in the 1930s. “He worked enormously hard for his family,” she wrote with evident pride, but he did not realize that his devotion to ideals derived from male privilege. As DiPrima put it,

...*he would at any time throw anything over for an ideal.* There were many stories of him quitting an otherwise okay job to protest some injustice to a fellow worker. At which point he would arrive home with the fellow worker and his entire family, at the very least for dinner. Often they stayed for weeks. My grandmother would set the table for that many more, and if a solution was not rapidly forthcoming she and the six girls would take in crochet beadwork to keep cash coming in until my grandfather found another, less unjust employer.¹⁵⁰

From this, DiPrima learned that it was women who kept life going. Domenico Mallozzi’s commitments to workplace justice depended on the creativity, ingenuity, and labor (paid and unpaid) of his female family members. “Men,” DiPrima determined, “were peripheral to all this. They were dear, they brought excitement, they sought to bring change. Printed newspapers, made speeches, tired to bring that taste of sanity and order into the larger world. But they were fragile somehow. In their excitement they would forget to watch the clock and turn the oven off. I grew up thinking them a luxury.”¹⁵¹

If DiPrima was exposed to this lesson from her grandparents’ example, she also learned it from her mother’s explicit didacticism. As she recounted the tale decades later, her mother warned her as a young child that “*women had to learn to bear more pain than men. That was just how they were made.*” DiPrima’s mother meant this literally; women, she explained, “had periods, had babies; even in cooking and cleaning they got hurt more. I would, she assured me, get used to it. My fingers would get callused, and pots and fire wouldn’t hurt as they did now. I looked forward to this armor as a good

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 2, emphasis in original.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 3.

thing; she described it as a blessing.”¹⁵² Yet, as she grew older, DiPrima came to think of this “armor,” in both physical and abstract senses, as anathema to all that was real and authentic in life. As a child, DiPrima suffered through physical, emotional, and, at the hands of her father, sexual abuse. Whenever she engaged in “unacceptable” behavior, such as spending time with friends in Washington Square Park as a teenager, her mother would weep, while her father was more likely to yell, scream, or even throw objects at her.¹⁵³ The first time DiPrima’s mother saw her wearing makeup, at age thirteen, she slapped her and cried during the entire car ride home from the dance DiPrima had been attending. As DiPrima recalled, her mother asked, “How could I do this? How could I do this to her?” as if growing up were a personal affront.¹⁵⁴ However, despite this brutal treatment, it was a subtler yet more insidious form of abuse that DiPrima felt most affected her life. In contrast to the frightening examples described above, what DiPrima recalled most forcefully was her mother’s incessant “cheerfulness.” A carefully-maintained pleasant façade, DiPrima saw this cheerfulness as “bought at the expense of much of what was real, what was deep in Emma’s life.” And because her mother never acknowledged anything unpleasant or uncomfortable in life, DiPrima and her siblings felt that they could not, either; only when their mother died did they feel free to discuss what they had previously felt compelled to keep hidden. As DiPrima put it, “it is clear to me now that that cheerfulness was a form of terrorism; a device of the totalitarian state. A form of black magick that constellated a world by willpower and froze it into place with fear. This magick has invaded every cell of my body; to this day I am fighting to get

¹⁵² Ibid., 26, emphasis in original.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 85, 98.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 68-9.

clear.” Interestingly, both DiPrima and her mother had difficulty assimilating into this schema the moments when she was *not* cheerful. In addition to the crying spells and fits that she used to control DiPrima’s behavior, she had also experienced as a teenager what she would only refer to as her “breakdown,” an incident severe enough to delay her entrance into college by three years. She noted this only in passing once DiPrima was already an adult and refused to say anything more about it, claiming to have forgotten about it entirely. Uncomfortable emotions and unpleasant realities were to stay buried; a woman’s life was characterized by nothing so much as inauthenticity.¹⁵⁵

This, then, was what DiPrima felt she had to look forward to were she to follow a woman’s prescribed path: an unending cycle of domestic labor combined with a mandate to bury one’s true feelings in favor of a pleasant, inoffensive veneer. Unsurprisingly, she framed the artist’s life as the antithesis of such unappealing, female-specific conformity. Thus, at age fourteen, DiPrima said goodbye to the gendered expectations of a conventional life, vowing instead to live “an artistic life.” With adult hindsight and tongue planted lightly in cheek, she related her adolescent self’s dramatic elegy to normalcy:

...I can taste the struggles. The things I now leave behind (I am fourteen). Simple comforts of the regular human world, sentimentalized for a moment into a worth, a worthiness they didn’t usually have for me even then. But now I am leaving them behind, never having had them. Now I am leaving them, perhaps for good. Leaving the quiet unquestioned living and dying, the simple one-love-and-marriage, children, material pleasures, easy securities. I am leaving the houses I will never own. Dishwashers. Carpets. Dull respect of dull neighbors. None of this matters really, I have already seen it all for the prison it is, but for that moment it matters tremendously.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 27-9.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 78.

Importantly, normalcy and convention were associated with prominent aspects of women's lives. Like Stella Adler, she imagined the world as a fundamentally irreconcilable dichotomy between the expected life of a woman and the life of an artist.

DiPrima's first escape—to Swarthmore College outside of Philadelphia—proved, however, to be no escape at all. After spending two summers enjoying the proximity of Washington Irving High School, where she was taking classes, to the bohemian allure of Union Square and Greenwich Village, she found her Swarthmore classmates unoriginal and her classes themselves uninspiring. She quickly learned, for example, that she would receive no encouragement for her writing. On her first day of English class in her first semester at the school, the professor welcomed his students by echoing Joyce Glassman's Barnard professor nearly verbatim. "Some of you," he began, "may be writers, we're not interested in that. I'm here to teach you to be *good critics*."¹⁵⁷ By her sophomore year, DiPrima noted, the interesting people whom she had met were dropping out—some of them drummed out by a hostile, homophobic atmosphere that equated nonconformity with sexual "deviance," some merely feeling uninspired by the generally conformist attitude of the other students.¹⁵⁸ Other than her relationships with these "maverick" women, DiPrima's only meaningful college experiences came from trips to nearby Chester, then poor and mostly black. Chester was also later the site of an SDS Economic and Research Action Project. As DiPrima put it, she and her friends "often went to Chester, just to get off campus. Go someplace we can think of as 'real': a Black jazz club." While her use of quotation marks suggests that, in the intervening decades between the experience and her description of it, DiPrima had realized the problematic

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 92.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 90.

nature of associating blackness with authenticity, it was very much a view that she held in the 1950s. Moreover, her description of the club as “easy and familiar” suggests a lack of awareness of how this white appropriation of black space may have been perceived by locals.¹⁵⁹

These trips to Chester, moreover, were not enough to compensate for the loneliness DiPrima felt as her social circle dwindled and the lack of satisfaction she found in her schoolwork. She felt that everyone at Swarthmore, herself included, were pretending to be something they were not. “*I am caught in a lie,*” she wrote, “*several lies, a bunch of them it seems. I am not what I seem. Neither is nearly anyone else in this place. They mostly take it for granted, but I cannot.*”¹⁶⁰ She contrasted her forays into bohemian New York with the smallness she perceived in “the deadly dullness of this college life”: “There were years before me when I had had all of New York to play in. This campus, stodgy town, and desperate nearby Chester, are clearly not enough. Even the woods have shrunk—become as small as they truly are. I can smell the ultimate poverty of spirit. And I am becoming starved, for joy, for honest feeling. My hunger for truth is turning into rage.” Frustrated with the “pretentious, awkward intellectual life, clipped speech, stiff bodies, unimaginative clothes, poor food, frequent alcohol, and deathly mores by which I find myself surrounded,” DiPrima found that, although her “family was prison,” the “cold intellect” of college life was merely “another prison.” She felt she had “been buried alive.”¹⁶¹ Halfway through her sophomore year, she decided to

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 91-2.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 92.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 92-3.

leave Swarthmore and return to New York. This news was greeted with a fit from her mother and a beating from her father, and DiPrima quickly moved out.¹⁶²

Living on her own in New York's East Village, DiPrima threw herself into the bohemian lifestyle she had dabbled in before. Although for a time she worked full-time filing papers at a sugar company on Wall Street, she eventually was able to survive off of odd jobs, including work as an artists' model. These endeavors left ample time for writing in cafes and coffee shops; attending exhibits, plays, films, jazz clubs, and folk concerts in Washington Square Park; and perusing museums. DiPrima also took in a rotating cast of transient characters who needed a place to stay. Importantly, DiPrima framed this lifestyle as a rebellion not only against her upbringing, but also against the 1950s more generally. First, by choosing the economic vagaries of the artist's life over the exuberant consumerism of the postwar era, one "was choosing as completely as possible for those times the life of the renunciant." Yet, looking closer, it is clear that, for DiPrima, opting out of consumerism—and mainstream culture more generally—was a way of avoiding culpability for the even uglier aspects of the time: "To be an outcast, outrider was the calling. Not fame, or publication. Keeping one's hands clean, not engaging. By staying on the outside we felt they weren't our wars, our murders, our mistakes... *I will do nothing to support this house*. Not ours the wars, the cruelty, murder, oppression." In quick succession, DiPrima rejected four prominent aspects of 1950s life: political repression, consumerism, suburban domesticity, and gender inequality. She offered the artist's life as a panacea to each:

*Not ours the men and women in madhouses, lobotomized, terrorized,
shocked, or drugged to death. Not ours the politics of witch-hunt: the
Rosenbergs, Wilhelm Reich, long-gone Sacco and Vanzetti.*

¹⁶² Ibid., 98.

Not ours the hideous heavy furniture, even. Overstuffed sofas covered in clear plastic, porcelain dragons/birds bearing lightbulbs in their teeth. The sliding glass doors looking out on decorous gardens.

The narrow and cruel judgments in the name of decency, order. Not ours the brutal marriages, children beaten into mental deficiency, the blind and blinding worship of money/achievement: is he a surgeon? Did she marry a corporate lawyer? The final word of judgment: "She could have done so much better for herself."

Not ours, the women kept home, locked out of sight. Hysterical or crazy—perhaps—but forbidden the use of therapy by their husbands, because the therapist had had the temerity to discuss the marriage, or these women's sex lives. Sacrosanct stuff of most secret domestic coercion. Secrets the men felt they had the right to keep.¹⁶³

For DiPrima, choosing not to participate was itself a political move, one that made more sense to her than the forms of activism engaged in by either her grandfather or her friend Larry Wallrich, "an anarchist and utter radical." Unable to participate in formal political action due to her "healthy suspicion of all 'organizations' as such," DiPrima's politics were nonetheless guided by a desire to "bring down the established order."¹⁶⁴ Yet, this desire never went beyond the personal choices people made in determining the direction of their lives—living like an artist was somehow enough to counter both the egregious, systematic abuses of civil liberties wrought under the aegis of anti-communism *and* the perceived narrowness of suburban domesticity.

Soon, though, DiPrima encountered the familiar dilemma pitting artistic pursuits against familial ones. "For the first time," she wrote, "a part of myself was at war with my art": she wanted to have a baby.¹⁶⁵ This desire led to something of an emotional-aesthetic crisis for DiPrima. As she explained decades later to her oldest daughter Jeanne, who was born in late 1957 after DiPrima became pregnant by a friend visiting

¹⁶³ Ibid., 102.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 213.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 161-2.

from out of town, her cohort of 1950s writers believed that the more one experienced, the better one's art would be. "Honey, you see," she told Jeanne, "we all thought *experience itself was good. Any experience.* That it could only be good to experience as much as possible."¹⁶⁶ As DiPrima soon discovered, though, the male-dominated literary world considered child-bearing and –rearing and "experience" mutually exclusive categories.

In part, this emphasis on experience was a reaction against the precisely ordered, even mechanized, world of the 1950s, a world fundamentally at odds with human needs. As DiPrima put it, this realization "*that human need and the Order of the World are at odds*" felt like the basis of "my very self, my identity." That is, she developed her identity in response to this fundamental dichotomy, one in which human beings were merely "soft and vulnerable flesh things of the world in a universe that seemed metal and precise as clockwork. Armored as beetles, and moving with blind precision, I could almost hear the clicks of the machine."¹⁶⁷ Although this insight came under the influence of her first experience with peyote in 1959, it is significant that, even decades later, DiPrima found such life-defining relevance in the realization that she was living in "a universe of absolute precision and mechanical law." Moreover, this was a belief that comported to a stunning degree with the 1950s and 1960s anti-Stalinist, anti-corporate discourse that pitted humans against machines. In DiPrima's iteration, it was

...a "metallic" universe...: I could hear the clicks and whirring sounds it made as it did its thing. It seemed to me then that nearly everything in this hard, shiny, deterministic thing was built to live there. Most of the creatures throughout the worlds (and I scanned many worlds that night) and most of the creatures on this one were "armored" (as I thought of it). They had hard, protective casings, which enabled them to move with some degree of impunity amongst the gears and engines, the "wheels within wheels." But humans—humans were not only

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 202.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 23.

armorless, but even furless. We moved helpless, soft, through this calculated dance, were crushed by this cosmic machine so easily... We were so tender, I wept for us.¹⁶⁸

DiPrima's assertion that being human meant being armorless also sheds new light on her earlier rejection of the special armor her mother had insisted women must develop. In this view, acceding to the demands of a woman's life necessitated giving up part of what made one truly human.

Surely, then, if one followed this argument—that authentic human experience was the most effective bulwark against a machine-like society—to its most logical conclusion, the profoundly human experiences of child-bearing and –rearing could only enhance one's art. As she put it, "I was a poet, I had work to do... It came to me... as a resolve, a vow: There was nothing that I could possibly experience, as a human in a female body, that I would not experience. Nothing I would try to avoid. No part of human life I would turn my back on. To me this was obviously just part of the job, part of what one as a writer set out to do." "To have a baby," she wrote, "to become a mother, this seemed to hold the essence of what I needed to know. To be. In order to be a woman and a poet. There should, it seemed to me, be no quarrel between these two aims: to have a baby and to be a poet."¹⁶⁹

But DiPrima knew this was not how it worked. Although it was only later that she would become cognizant of the extent to which the 1950s literary world was dominated by a "male cabal: self-satisfied, competitive, glorying in small acclaims,"¹⁷⁰ she realized even as a young person that, as a woman, there were additional obstacles

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 211.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 161-2.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 107.

standing in the way of her participation in this world. She noted, for example, that she knew “no women writers who were *artists first*, who held to their work as to their very souls.” Rather, DiPrima perceived that “women writers and would-be writers” fell into two categories: those who believed that art was compatible with material comforts and thus never truly devoted themselves to their work, and those who eschewed convention and threw themselves utterly into their work, often turning to drugs for comfort and, as a result, prostitution for income.¹⁷¹ All available evidence seemed to suggest that being a woman and being an artist were incompatible; as DiPrima noted, “there was inevitable guilt in being woman and artist, no matter how ‘clear’ one tried to get, and that this guilt alone would bring one down eventually. At any rate make one sick. I knew no older women artists who were not ill. Not in the 1950s.”¹⁷² Moreover, female-specific experiences of child-bearing and –rearing simply did not fall under the rubric of experiences thought to have a salutary effect on one’s art. Partly this was logistical—as Hettie Jones pointed out, childrearing left little time or energy for creative work—and partly it was ideological. One night when her daughter was still young, DiPrima was invited to visit her then-neighbor Allen Ginsberg, with whom she had struck up a correspondence years before. Several of Ginsberg’s friends, including Jack Kerouac, were also there. After an enjoyable few hours spent drinking, smoking marijuana, and intensely discussing the writing life, DiPrima made to leave: it was after eleven o’clock, and she had promised the babysitter she would be home by 11:30. While all in attendance protested, it was Kerouac who made clear the incompatibility between motherhood and artistry. “DI PRIMA,” he insisted in no uncertain terms, “UNLESS

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 223.

¹⁷² Ibid., 198.

YOU FORGET ABOUT YOUR BABYSITTER, YOU'RE NEVER GOING TO BE A WRITER.”¹⁷³

A few years later, DiPrima developed a poetics that took into account the exigencies of women's lives—the demands on their time and energy and the difficulties of finding uninterrupted stretches of time to devote to writing. Asked by the editors of a prominent literary journal to describe her aesthetic philosophy, DiPrima was only able to get so far as to suggest that “THE REQUIREMENTS OF OUR LIFE IS THE FORM OF OUR ART.” Although the truth of this statement extended to a certain extent to all artists dealing with “*the grind of economics, the various ugly requirements of our lives and choices,*” DiPrima intended it specifically as a comment on the difficulties faced by women artists. “*The ‘us,’*” she wrote, “*was—the women.*” That is, the single most important factor determining the shape of women's art—indeed, noting the singular “is,” the *only* significant factor—was whether or not their chosen form could be combined with domestic and familial responsibilities: “*the writing of modular poems, that could be dropped and picked up, the learning to sketch when you used to work in oils*”:

THE REQUIREMENTS (*all of them*) OF OUR LIFE (*simply, in many ways it is one and the same life, as the requirements are not plural, but singular, hence:)* IS (*not ‘are’ there are no plurals here, the Requirements a monolithic unsorted bundle of demands, formulated for the most part elsewhere, but acceded to blindly, somehow still we manage to make art ‘do the work’ as we say*) THE FORM OF OUR ART.

Often, this insistence was met with blank stares and incomprehension; even thirty years later, DiPrima noted, would “*an occasional friend or student nod in agreement. Get it.*”¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ Ibid., 201-2.

Unlike Stella Adler, DiPrima wrote women into the culture of authenticity by broadening the concept of aesthetically useful experiences. She wrote, “the work is a part of the life, and you have leave to stop it, become a hobo, a mother, disappear, get sick, strung out, and you have leave to go back to it, and maybe you’ll be as good as you were before. Maybe you’ll be even better. Because in one sense, one part of yourself, you never do stop.”¹⁷⁵ Women did not need to go “on the road” to achieve authenticity. They merely needed to write about the reality of their own lives. It was in recognizing this that DiPrima and other Beat women most clearly anticipated the women’s liberation movement.

In the most recent addition to this genre of memoirs written by women about their experiences in the 1950s, fiction writer and journalist Anne Roiphe similarly detailed her desire to escape from the world of repressive conformity and attain greater authenticity. Although not a member of the same countercultural circle as Joyce Johnson, Hettie Jones, and Diane DiPrima, her experiences shed additional light on the difficulties women had seeing the legitimacy of their own experiences, thoughts, and feelings. Roiphe described the 1950s, specifically but not limited to women’s lives, as characterized by nothing so much as dishonesty. Repression and dishonesty, moreover, were not merely individual problems but rather constituted a sickness of the nation itself, going so far as to ascribe to it the virulence of McCarthy’s anti-communist witch-hunts. In light of these realities, the young Anne Roiphe was determined to attach herself to an artistic man, not—as in the case of Hettie Cohen or Diane DiPrima—to become an artist herself; as a woman, she

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 226-7, all emphasis in original.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 224.

“feared that...I had no subject.”¹⁷⁶ Much of her story’s significance, however, lies in her eventual conviction that her own voice was just as important as a man’s.

Growing up with an ever-coiffed mother and a father who railed against communists, Anne Roiphe’s New York upbringing in a prominent Jewish family (McCarthy aide Roy Cohn was her cousin) was far tonier than that of the three women discussed above. Determined not to become like her mother, she rebelled against the training that was preparing her to be an appendage to a wealthy man, damning her in the process to living an inauthentic, conformist life. “I believed that the most certain way to die was to live a normal life, a gray-flannel-suited life, a lonely crowded life, a life of commuter trains and country club luncheons,”¹⁷⁷ she wrote, referring to Sloan Wilson’s novel *The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit* and sociologist David Riesman’s *The Lonely Crowd*. “As I grew into young adulthood,” she wrote, “[I] began to speak of ‘conformity,’ as if it were the great witch in the closet of one’s childhood fears. Normal life beckoned with all the appeal of soiled bedsheets.”¹⁷⁸ She wrote “a long list of things I would never do: I would never have my hair set in a beauty parlor. I would never move to a suburb and bake cakes or make casseroles. I would never go to a country club dance...I would never invest in the stock market. I would never play canasta. I would never wear pearls...I would never go near a man who had a portfolio or a set of golf clubs or a business or even a business suit.”¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁶ Anne Roiphe, *Art and Madness: A Memoir of Lust Without Reason* (New York: Nan A. Talese/Doubleday, 2011), 187.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

College itself provided no panacea for the trap Roiphe was certain she would fall into did she not find another way out. She began as a student at Smith College but quickly realized that she did not fit in there. She could not relate to her classmates, who appeared to Roiphe to be content to knit socks for their boyfriends at other schools and dream of their future marriages. Soon, her progressive politics and unconventional appearance led to accusations of kleptomania and a referral to the school psychiatrist.¹⁸⁰ She decided to transfer to Sarah Lawrence after her first year.

There, however, as a young woman with a talent and desire for writing, she found her hopes quashed by poet Horace Gregory, with whom she took a writing course. Gregory, she noted, “did not believe that the personal was a subject fit for consumption. He did not believe that the thoughts of women were worth the paper they were written on. He said so, often.” When a classmate of Roiphe’s submitted a wrenching story of divorce, Gregory went on the attack. “What makes you think anyone cares about your divorce?,” he asked. Roiphe had been deeply moved by her classmate’s story, but she learned from this incident that the experiences particular to women provided no fodder for valuable art. “I had no heroic subject to offer,” she noted sadly, “I had no encounters with raging bulls. I had not and would not be going to war. I knew nothing about sex or death. I had nothing to say. I had no story. I became a muse instead of a writer. The costume fit.” That is, war, travel, and adventure—experiences most commonly associated with men—were perfectly acceptable, indeed laudable, topics to write about, while familial and domestic relationships—seen as the sphere of women—were not.

As Roiphe saw it, the only option was to bury what was inside of her and instead put on a costume—if she could not express who she truly was, at least she could choose

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 137-8.

the kind of person she pretended to be.¹⁸¹ And she *was* aware that nonconformity itself was a role, one actively pursued and meticulously maintained. As a college student on vacation in France, for example, she noted that her bohemian self-presentation was by no means unique:

I find a café. I order in French. I am wearing my favorite sweater. It has a few holes in it. I am wearing blue jeans and dark eye makeup. I am the anti-Smith girl. Everything about me announces that I am opposed to country clubs everywhere. I am the enemy of suburban lawns and gold bracelets, fraternities, Fascists, and stockbrokers, and all that interests me is the making of art, the writing of poetry, the life of rebellion. I think I am a nonconformist but as I look around me in the bar I see that I am wearing a uniform. All the other women look like me, pale, free of nail polish, wearing black leotards and thick sandals, a toughness in their straight backs, ink stains on the fingers, notebooks in the lap, and a nervous blinking of the eye.¹⁸²

Under the circumstances, however, the role of the nonconformist seemed the least onerous alternative, especially in comparison to the conventional woman's role captured so vividly in Adlai Stevenson's commencement address at Smith College in 1955, the year after Roiphe left the school (she also pointed out that 1955 was the year of Sylvia Plath's graduation from Smith). Stevenson had emphasized to his audience of young graduates that the most important roles on which they would embark were those of wives and mothers.¹⁸³

Moreover, Roiphe framed her calculated assumption of identity as a fundamentally American decision. Only here, she believed, was it possible for people to cast off old identities and choose new ones. She worried that her flirtations with bohemianism made her a fraud, likening herself to *Henry IV's* Prince Hal. "Was I Prince

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 73-4.

¹⁸² Ibid., 73.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 53.

Hal pretending to be one of the fellows when at any moment I could go back to my place on Park Avenue, put on a pretty dress, and change my life?," she wondered, "Was I a fraud? The answer is yes, yes I could have changed my mind like Prince Hal, but no, I meant it." In creating a new identity for herself, Roiphe was merely participating in "what it means to be an American." She was free to cast off her history as "a Jewish girl, . . . the granddaughter of a man who founded a shirt company from the back of his pushcart" in order to "follow Paul Bowles to Morocco, to find Henry Miller in the hills of California, to visit the grave of Balzac, or to travel with Ernest [Hemingway] to Kilimanjaro and stand in the brush while the rhinoceros charged past." The salient factor was that she "meant it." In America, Roiphe seemed to argue, one authentically *was* what one *pretended to be*.

Yet, as Roiphe put it, "it is true what they said about the fifties. You really were supposed to behave. You wanted to look like all those around you and keep your lawn free of floating leaves and nasty weeds. You wanted to live inside the lines where the ordinariness of everything would protect you from the dragons that lay at the edge of the map ready to blow fire in your face if you strayed off course, to the edge of the known world." These rules, Roiphe argued, were intended "to keep life at bay, life like the big waves at the shore, to be rushed into, to be ridden up and down, life that tasted of salt and could pull you out over your head." According to the conventions of the day, that kind of life was to be avoided at all costs." To Roiphe, however, "that was just the life I was seeking." So important were these social rules, Roiphe suggested, that they almost functioned as requirements of citizenship, and gendered ones at that. "The social rules wanted me," she wrote, "just the way Uncle Sam wanted the boys my age to go to

Korea.” Cold War citizenship, that is, demanded military service of men and acquiescent conformity of women.¹⁸⁴

Given no reason to believe that she could attain authenticity on her own, Roiphe sought to find it by attaching herself to an artistic man. Even at seventeen, she “was ready to run the bulls in Pamplona should the opportunity arise.” She never imagined getting there on her own, though; rather, she was “waiting for a man to carry me on his back, to support my world, to lift me up and never put me down.”¹⁸⁵ The support she sought was not, however, the financial stability that was the “prize” of adhering to upwardly mobile models of heteronormativity. Instead, as the “muse to a man of great talent,” she would be saved from the tedium of suburban domesticity, instead embarking on adventures to “visit the bordellos of Morocco and sleep under the stars with the peasants of Franco’s Spain.” She imagined herself in a role akin to that of Zelda Fitzgerald, acknowledging the sadness of her model’s life yet not hesitating to romanticize it. Creating art, Roiphe believed, was worth whatever pain and suffering were necessary to produce it. “I knew that art,” she wrote, “the written word, was worth dying for. I would have thrown myself under the wheels of an oncoming car if, as it moved forward, an undiscovered manuscript of Camus’s had fluttered down to the ground.”¹⁸⁶ Her own survival paled in comparison to the importance of contributing—even on a proxy basis—to the creation of art. Even a relationship with an unfaithful male artist was “far more appealing” than marriage to “a banker or a lawyer.” Unable to dream of attaining greatness on her own, a woman could only hope to “bear his [the male

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 81-2.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 5.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 11.

artist's] children and wash his clothes and care for him because there lay her own immortality, there lay her own contribution to the great effort to speak the truth, to shape the words, to write the novel that by existing would justify the human endeavor, an endeavor so clearly in need of justification."¹⁸⁷ She did not understand how any women "married men who did not want to be writers, men who would be ordinary, pay bills, hold down jobs, think whatever everyone else thought, who would not make something new, write a play, a novel, paint a canvas. What were these women doing with their lives?" she wondered, "It seemed so sad to live without a reach to the glorious, to be silent while the world passed by. I thought that women who had married doctors and lawyers, stockbrokers and dealers in real estate or politicians had settled, lost hope."¹⁸⁸

Roiphe was aware that the life she imagined as an artist's muse came with problems, but she was nevertheless eager to embrace it, going so far as to embrace rampant alcoholism. "I knew," she wrote, "that night after night I would see empty glass after empty glass sit on the table as the men in the room called for refills, another, the one after that. I would watch them grow unsteady and make wild accusations and push each other. I would watch as the amber liquids pooled in the cells of the liver, turned the capillaries of the eyes red with eagerness, and made even very young hands shake as they waved in exaggerated gestures through smoke-filled rooms."¹⁸⁹ Despite these realities, she remained determined to "only love a wild thing," not caring if "wild things tended to break hearts. I didn't care if they substituted scotch for breakfast cereal. I understood that wild things wrote at notes to the gods and were apt to show up three hours later than

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 16-17.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 58.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 11.

promised. I understood that art was long and life was short.” More, she understood that women who hitched their futures to male artists “had a great task: to pay bills, to supply meals, to keep fear of poverty at bay so creation could continue.”¹⁹⁰ The role of the breadwinner was handed over to women, but its concomitant power was not; escape from the world of material concerns was a male privilege born of both ideology and, as discussed above, federal policy.

When she met her future husband, the writer Jack Richardson, he seemed to fit the bill perfectly. A man “not meant for ordinary tasks of mortal days,”¹⁹¹ Richardson was, at the time of his and Roiphe’s meeting, a veteran of the Korean War attending Columbia University on the G.I. Bill, which, along with women, provided the material support necessary for so many of the male artists who believed authentic experiences were necessary to produce great art. He was a poet who was “attracted to suicide and death” and “intended to die young.”¹⁹² From the beginning, theirs was a relationship in which Roiphe was the caretaker, providing for Richardson’s material needs so he could focus on his art. After drinking too much at the West End Bar, he was unable to get himself home, and the responsibility fell to Roiphe. This would quickly become a pattern, although Sarah Lawrence, where Roiphe was still a student, was a not inconsequential commute from the city. “Soon it was clear,” she wrote, “that I would drive him home whenever he liked, and I would buy the drinks and I would bring the cigarettes and I would hope that he would remember me, sitting there.”¹⁹³ So drawn was she to his “genius, the wonder of

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 12.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 7.

¹⁹² Ibid., 98-9.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 100-2.

it, the daring of it, the anti-golf course of it, the anti-financial sheet of it, the anti-day after day of it,” however, that she did not balk at this arrangement.¹⁹⁴

Once married, Roiphe worked as a receptionist at a public relations firm during the day while Richardson stayed home to write.¹⁹⁵ At night, she typed up his manuscripts while he went out drinking (but not before he went through Roiphe’s purse and took any money that happened to be there). But the \$65 Roiphe made per week, even when combined with pawning the wedding presents they had recently received, was not enough to cover both regular household expenses and her husband’s drinking habits, often sending Roiphe to her mother for financial help.¹⁹⁶ She herself would occasionally have to go without lunch or continue wearing shoes that had worn through, so strenuously did Richardson’s drinking burden their finances.¹⁹⁷ Despite all of this, Roiphe “thought he was perfect.”¹⁹⁸ When she finished typing a play of his in 1959, she felt like “the most fortunate woman in the world.”¹⁹⁹

One especially heartbreaking incident captured the nature of Roiphe’s and Richardson’s relationship. One snowy night in December of 1960, Roiphe, then nine

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 63-4.

¹⁹⁵ Best known as a playwright, Richardson’s work, which included plays produced Off- and on Broadway, occasionally brought the couple into contact with theatrical luminaries. In an interesting aside that sheds further light on her understanding of the relationship between art and life, Roiphe described a party they attended in honor of Lee Strasberg. She wrote, “Here [the Actors Studio] the actors learn to search their own souls for the emotions that float beneath the character’s lines. Here Freud casts his shadow. In the depths of the soul lies universal truth. If you need tears think on a sad event in your own story. Every actor has a sad story or they wouldn’t be standing on a stage asking us to look at them, listen to them. They would wear their own faces and go about their business like the people who sell car insurance or the housewives who make fruit Jell-O.” Ibid., 162.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 53-7.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 69.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 57.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 69.

months pregnant, had gone to a repair shop to pick up her husband's typewriter. With the storm strong enough to stop the buses from running, Roiphe had decided to walk the fifteen blocks to their apartment when her water broke. There was not a cab in sight, and so she struggled to the nearest pay phone a few blocks away to call her husband, who he was sleeping and would not answer the phone. With no other forms of recourse, Roiphe walked the twenty blocks to the hospital, where she called her mother.²⁰⁰

Roiphe connected the nature of her marriage with her abandonment of her lifelong plan to become a writer, to “hear the low hum of reality under the disguises it so cleverly donned.” Upon meeting her husband, she wrote, “I lost the desire to write. I wanted Jack to write the words that he could write. I wanted him to take his place in the firmament of stars. I thought he would outshine [James] Joyce and I thought I had found my place, which was to type his manuscripts carefully, to put them in envelopes and mail them to editors here and there.” She herself felt too “ordinary” to accomplish what the few well-known women writers had been able to do, and she refused to be “mediocre,” which would be no better than to be “washed away into the rivers of banality,” the fate that in her view befell most women in the 1950s.²⁰¹ Only once her marriage ended in 1963—Richardson announced that he had had enough and moved out²⁰²—did she resume writing. At that point, Roiphe determined that it was enough to “work with whatever lay within me.” She wrote “about the child [her daughter] and what she did. I wrote about my mother and my father and my aunts and my uncles. I wrote the stories my mother had told me about her father and his first years on the Lower East Side.” She had come

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 186-7.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 187-8.

²⁰² Ibid., 185.

to believe that her truth and her experiences were enough to produce meaningful art.²⁰³

When she married again several years later, it was to a man whose most defining characteristic was his kindness toward children, his refusal to separate the world into a female sphere of childcare and domestic duties and male sphere of the professions, with the latter perceived as realer and more significant than the former.

Eventually, Joyce Johnson, Hettie Jones, Diane DiPrima, and Anne Roiphe discovered that the truth of their own lives was worth telling; the fact that they had not gone on the road did not mean that they had no experiences worth memorializing in art. The battle was not yet won, however. As the remainder of this dissertation is devoted to showing, the gender politics of authenticity remained largely unchanged between the 1950s and 1960s. Like the male Beats who contrasted the authenticity of the road with the inauthenticity of women's childrearing, domestic, and wage work responsibilities, the men who dominated Students for a Democratic Society dismissed women's concerns not only as petty and trivial, but as proof that they were incapable of breaking free from the stultifying, inauthentic conformity that made participatory democracy impossible. Both groups of men, however, also insisted that the self, its experiences, and emotions were the only source of truth, and so they unwittingly provided women with the very tools they used to combat sexism.

²⁰³ Ibid., 189.

Chapter Five: “Men Who Think Like Human Beings” in a “Dehumanized Community”: Occupations, Authenticity, and the Student Left

“SDS in trying to build a radical movement in America is trying to bring meaning back to individual’s lives [sic]. One of the phrases repeated over and over again in SDS literature, speeches, press pamphlets, etc. is that we want to build a society in which ‘people have control over the decisions that affect their lives.’ Creating that kind of society requires that individuals everywhere start confronting the forces that oppress them and claim their own individuality and their ability to decide things for themselves. Just as I don’t want Lyndon Johnson telling me who the enemy is, I don’t want someone in my university telling me what I should learn...So to us believing in yourself is believing in a radical new democracy in America. And one can’t happen without the other...you cannot find yourself unless you are engaged in a struggle to remake the society that oppresses you and denies you the right to a self-identity.” — Steve Halliwell, Assistant National Secretary, Students for a Democratic Society, 1967¹

This chapter, the first of three exploring the role of authenticity in the thinking of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), focuses on the two main institutions governing Americans’ occupational lives: paid work and the educational system. As structured in the 1950s and 1960s, both, SDS members argued, took away a person’s ability “to live a life that is personally authentic,” to borrow Tom Hayden’s memorable phrase from the Port Huron Statement. That is, work and education were dehumanizing forces that demanded the abandonment of individual thought, turning flesh-and-blood humans into no more than cogs in a machine. In their quest to remake the nature of work, SDS members believed they had technology on their side; if *actual* machines were able to take over the dehumanizing labor that had *deprived* workers of their humanity, everyone

¹ Steve Halliwell to Tom Hayden, August 17, 1967, series 3, no. 1, Students for a Democratic Society Papers (Glen Rock, N.J.: Microfilming Corp. of America, 1977), microfilm [hereafter “Students for a Democratic Society Papers”].

would be free to pursue the creative passions that truly expressed their authentic inner selves. Similarly, an alternative educational system would be able to break through the years and decades of social training that had left people spiritually dead, not even fully human. In making these arguments, SDS members' thought bore many similarities to 1950s Cold War discourse, which imagined the free, authentic individual as a bulwark against the repressive conformity of the Stalinist Soviet Union.

Founded in 1960 as the student wing of the socialist, anti-Stalinist League for Industrial Democracy (LID), SDS, which became independent from LID in 1965 after years of tension, quickly became one of the most prominent groups in the emerging New Left. Populated by idealistic young people troubled by the discrepancy between American discourses of freedom and equality and American realities of poverty, discrimination, and militarism, many of its early members were simultaneously steeped in experience with the civil rights movement, particularly the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), from which it borrowed both philosophy and strategy. In the first five years of its existence, SDS developed a range of community-organizing initiatives in support of racial justice and economic self-determination and in opposition to militarism and economic inequality. It also pursued two other ambitious objectives that have received less attention from historians: an end to the wage-based economy and an educational structure that would allow Americans to reclaim their full humanity, both goals intended to prevent, or rescue, people from being simply cogs in a machine. Drawing on the organization's extensive archival records, I argue that the reforms they sought to work and education were motivated by a desire for greater authenticity—the ability to express their most deeply-held thoughts, feelings, and beliefs. Despite

troubling connections to the conservative rhetoric of anti-communism and serious blind spots regarding the function of power in race, class, and gender relations, the SDS goal of authenticity should be understood (recalling Tennessee Williams) as a powerful plea for humanism in the face of a dehumanizing society. In their earnestly idealistic plans for a post-scarcity, post-work world in which education, untethered from the military-industrial complex, was intended primarily to give individuals the tools to pursue their passions and express their emotions, SDS members imagined a people- rather than profit-centered society.

Work

Largely absent from the scholarship on SDS has been their focus on the changing nature of work. While it is true that, by the end of the 1960s, members came to believe in a theory (the “new working class”) that made students, not workers, the agents of social change, such was not always the case. What reading this interpretation onto the early 1960s misses is the organization’s often intense focus on the problem of automation, technological developments that were allowing machines to take over jobs previously held by humans. On an economic level, SDS members feared that automation would increase unemployment and attenuate the power of organized labor. On a deeper level, however, they tentatively argued that automation could actually *keep* humans from being *turned into* machines.

SDS did care about work and the working classes, but in ways very different from their Old Left forebears. They did not focus, as the earlier group did, on radicalizing those in the industrial workforce in the hopes of awakening class consciousness and

bringing about an eventual revolution of the proletariat. The workplace was no forum for raising consciousness; indeed, it served precisely the opposite function in the view of these 1960s radicals. In their view, the workplace was a deadening prison that deprived people of their humanity and individuality, turning them into cogs in a machine geared only toward making as much profit as possible. Putting an Adornian spin on the old demand for “eight hours for what you will,” SDS members argued that even those hours devoted to recreation were structured by the deadening nature of industrial work. The only way to free people to be truly creative, autonomous, authentic individuals was to restructure the nature of work entirely.

Luckily, the possibility for doing exactly this lay just on the horizon, and it went by the name automation. While SDS shared with other 1960s sources ranging from the Department of Labor to *Star Trek* and *2001: A Space Odyssey* the fear that human superiority was slowly being supplanted by machine technology, leaving in its wake vast unemployment and/or, in the more apocalyptic imaginings, a vision of human beings as the slaves of machines, they also saw another, more urgent, issue: human beings had already been *turned into* machines. However, if productive (in traditional economic terms) work was turned over to machines entirely, people, unchained from their role in creating profits for wealthy individuals and corporations, would be left to reclaim their humanity through autonomous, creative pursuits. These developments would not come about naturally; if left to its own devices, automation would likely function merely to serve the powerful, leading to an oligarchy consisting only of kings and peons. Yet, automation’s liberating potential was too great for SDS members to ignore.

As SDS members' fears of automation bore much in common with ideas that were broadly circulating in the postwar era, so, too, did their hopes. As Howard Brick has also noted, their position on work and automation was particularly consonant with the ideas of Herbert Marcuse, among others.² In its current incarnation, Marcuse argued in 1964, technology's deployment in advanced industrial society encouraged conformity, and therefore it was inherently totalitarian. The rising standard of living brought about by the postwar affluent society, that is, compelled those who may otherwise have been a source of anti-capitalist resistance to acquiesce to the system—to put material comfort over true freedom. As technology made work less physically demanding and thus less onerous, people were less inclined to protest against their own oppression. In Marcuse's words, "under the conditions of a rising standard of living, non-conformity with the system itself appears to be socially useless, and the more so when it entails tangible economic and political disadvantages and threatens the smooth operation of the whole."³ Affluence, because it demanded "the suppression of individuality,"⁴ was thus itself a form of totalitarianism; people had so internalized the demand to be productive above all else that even their "inner consciousness[es] had been reduced to "almost mechanical reactions."⁵

² Howard Brick, *Age of Contradiction: American Thought and Culture in the 1960s* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 4-5, 54-55. I build on Brick's work by connecting SDS views on work and automation to the importance they placed on authenticity.

³Reading between the lines, it is easy to see this position as a condemnation of organized labor. Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 2.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

Yet, Marcuse also believed that technology held the potential to bring about freedom not only from want, but also from the cogs-in-a-machine conformity capitalism demanded. In its dehumanizing focus on profit, capitalism forced people into “the pure form of servitude: to exist as an instrument, as a thing.”⁶ Although in its current form work turned people *into* machines, it was also true that “to the extent to which the work world is conceived of as a machine and mechanized accordingly, it becomes the *potential* basis for a new freedom for man.”⁷ In other words, the mechanization of production could stave off the mechanization of people. “If the individual were no longer compelled to prove himself on the market,” Marcuse argued,

...the technological processes of mechanization and standardization might release individual energy into a yet uncharted realm of freedom beyond necessity. The very structure of human existence would be altered; the human would be liberated from the work world’s imposing upon him alien needs and alien possibilities. The individual would be free to exert autonomy over a life that would be his own. If the productive apparatus could be organized and directed toward the satisfaction of the vital needs, its control must be centralized; such control would not prevent individual autonomy, but render it possible.⁸

In an economic system that no longer demanded people work for the money necessary for material survival, individuals would be able to reclaim their humanity. “Complete automation,” he wrote, “would open the dimension of free time as the one in which man’s private *and* societal existence would constitute itself. This would be the historical transcendence toward a new civilization.”⁹

SDS’s hopes for automation, however, were implicitly gendered. Despite a professed desire to blur the distinctions between work and not-work, their vision focused

⁶ Ibid., 33.

⁷ Ibid., 3.

⁸ Ibid., 2.

⁹ Ibid., 37.

only on how the need to make money inhibited one's ability to engage in creative pursuits and authentic self-expression. If the former disappeared, this argument implied, the latter would automatically be fulfilled. Completely missing from this equation was the unpaid work performed by women in the home, which often made them feel similarly alienated from their true selves. Chapter three explored the (ultimately problematic) ways in which liberal feminists dealt with these issues, and chapter eight will chart the paths taken by women's liberationists.

SDS members acknowledged a history of automation dating back to the 1940s.¹⁰ In the 1960s, they argued, its effects were being felt in new and more serious ways. The organization began paying a great deal of attention to these developments in its 1963 follow-up to the Port Huron Statement, a document eventually known as "America and the New Era." In effect, an early draft argued, automation severed "the traditional connection between economic expansion and enlarged employment," with employers choosing to pay for new technology rather than new workers. Humans were becoming obsolete, so much so that, in the 1950s, industrial production increased by 70%, while actual industrial employment rates remained stagnant. Automation had the potential to affect not only the industrial sector, but rather to drive all workers, from farm laborers to white-collar workers, "out of traditional economic society." By some estimates, as many as 75,000 new jobs were needed per week in order to compensate for the combined effects of automation and the growth of the American workforce. Low-paying service sector jobs, which were expanding, were no panacea to this dilemma.¹¹

¹⁰ In reality, the problem of automation predated the 1940s by more than a century.

¹¹ American Scene Document Draft, June 7, 1963, series 2A, no. 3, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

Whereas in previous decades military spending had compensated for dwindling employment opportunities in the private sector, new military technology that could be produced without large numbers of production-line workers meant this was no longer the case. Since World War Two, a “permanent war economy” had been “a stimulant to capitalist expansion.” Now, however, the vast numbers of workers needed to produce “traditional military ‘hardware’” such as “guns, tanks, bombers, etc.” had “been replaced by an electronic warfare system depending on a limited number of missiles, spy and warning systems, and other esoteric materials.” This shift hit unskilled workers particularly hard, as the specialized knowledge of the skilled technician came to be more in demand than the sheer number of hands that characterized World War Two-era production. In short, “any defense system which stresses limited numbers of ‘luxury’ items such as Minuteman and Polaris missiles, fighter-plane units, and submarines can not have the Keynesian Multiplier capability, cannot employ millions of men, and cannot free skills and brainpower to shore up the economy against its competitors everywhere in the world.” In the face of attenuated private-sector opportunities, “the transformation of the defense economy removes one palliative from the incredible employment problem being created by advancing technology.” Moreover, what defense jobs did exist did not spur the kinds of secondary economic and community development characteristic of World War Two-era factories, for “gas stations and motels do not spur up around Minuteman launching pads.”¹²

Subsequent drafts of this document expanded on the observation that automation, in addition to the problems cited above, “short-circuits the collective bargaining process

¹²Ibid.

and creates important tensions between labor and management.”¹³ To begin, automation meant, quite simply, a smaller pool of workers from which organized labor could potentially draw its membership. Even the threat of potential automation could attenuate the power of organized labor, with employers eager to use the occasion of a strike to automate while their workers were on the picket line. Automation would thus decrease the amount of control people exercised over their lives and labor, making the economy even more beholden to corporate interests. Meanwhile, the specter of reduced employment meant that organized labor would likely focus on preserving the jobs that did exist, rather than reaching out to potential new members. As a result, “a whole generation of young adults, potentially new blood for unionism, are now a growing pool of alienated, frustrated people, whose political direction could as easily be hostile as it could be friendly to the unions and their members.” In other words, unemployed young people were likely to see unions not as possible allies, but as entrenched forces jealously guarding their own hard-won privileges. Yet, SDS members did not seem to begrudge the unions’ (admittedly hypothetical) response. They saw it as a reasonable response to circumstances beyond the unions’ control.¹⁴

Automation was also of great concern to those involved in SDS’s Jobs Or Income Now (JOIN) programs, community-organizing initiatives similar to the organization’s Economic Research and Action Project (ERAP). In a flier intended to educate the public on the dangers of automation, for example, Chicago JOIN noted that, for jobs, “*it means trouble.*” Rendering human beings obsolete, they argued, “automation is already displacing *40,000 workers each week* (2 million each year).” In addition to worries about

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴“America and the New Era,” series 2A, no. 3, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

unemployment, this publication also included an undercurrent of fear related to machine intelligence: while “ordinary factory machines help men to produce goods more efficiently, . . . automation *replaces* men. Automated machines are controlled by giant computers that almost *think* for themselves, without human guidance.”¹⁵

In this publication, JOIN members expressed their fear that automation would lead to unemployment; obsolescence; and a deeper, more abstract loss of what might be called human exceptionalism (the superiority of human intuition and problem-solving over a machine’s artificial intelligence). However, other JOIN publications, and often SDS thought in general, took a more nuanced, ambivalent view of the problems and potential of automation. As the Alliance for Jobs or Income Now put it in the evocatively titled flier “Men and Machines,” automation had so far “brought unemployment to millions of steel workers, coal miners, printers, railroad men, auto workers and longshoremen.” Their economic predictions at first glance appeared even more dire than those in the flier discussed above, citing an average of 70,000 jobs lost per week to automation. To alleviate the misery caused by such losses, “Men and Machines” called for “a basic family income of \$5400 a year . . . a 25-hour work week . . . massive public works . . . allocation of new industries to depressed areas,” and an educational program designed to alert people to both the perils and promise of automation. For despite sobering statistics about job loss, the authors of this document recognized that automation contained within it the potential to free people from what Henry David Thoreau called “lives of quiet desperation.” If new technologies could bring about an end to scarcity, and if they could do so without human workers, workers would be free from both

¹⁵Chicago JOIN, “What is Automation?,” undated, series 2B, no. 42, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

competition for scarce resources and the backbreaking labor needed to secure them.

Tellingly, “Men and Machines” began not with dire statistics but rather with a promise that “the end of human toil and an undreamed of abundance are in sight.” If implemented in a thoughtful manner, its authors argued, automation could bring about “the promised world,” “an end to want add worry,” and “unbounded wealth.”¹⁶

Indeed, the most striking development between early and later drafts of what became “America and the New Era” is the increased attention to the liberating effects of automation; that is, its potential to serve as a bulwark against the dehumanizing effects of alienated labor. Many of these revisions were first initiated by then-SDS Assistant National Secretary Donald McKelvey, who submitted his version of the document in July 1963. In his more optimistic view, automation could serve as a panacea to the emptiness many people experienced in their lives. It could mean the “possibility of releasing men, both during their work and extra-work hours, for more creative existences.” Freeing people from the dehumanizing effects of work and, concomitantly, the “de-individualization” of “mass culture,” automation would allow for the development of “autonomous local communities and power centers.” It was the first step in the move toward the “economic decentralization” granting control to people rather than corporations, which was “necessary for humanizing in the face of technology’s rise.” McKelvey was not naïve, however. He held out little hope that these changes could take place in the face of “absolutely no effort on the part of the [Kennedy] Administration to move the society spiritually (by playing up need for creative individuality and what it means) or materially toward this goal.” He doubted that, barring a “time of deep crisis,”

¹⁶Alliance for Jobs Or Income Now, “Men and Machines,” undated, series 2B, no. 88, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

it would be possible to “produce...a regime capable to meet the drastic economic, racial, *human* problems outlined here.”¹⁷ Despite these reservations, the humanizing potential of automation would attain increasing prominence in SDS rhetoric after 1963.

Another iteration of this theme manifested itself in a related document, “A New Agenda for America.” This was another, ultimately discarded, version of what became “America and the New Era.” The ability of students and others to build a new political movement, this document claimed, relied in large part “on the way American society deals with automation.” The promise of automation lay in its opening up “of a world of plenty. It could give America a chance to help the world while living at relatively prosperous levels. Automation “could give ‘leisure’ to all, and change the meaning of ‘work.’” That is, without the economic calculus by which work necessarily meant activities that brought in money, people would be free to pursue their own interests. Their creative pursuits, non-productive in traditional economic terms, would become their work. Herein lay automation’s “revolutionary potential”: “it allows general social control of enterprise without chaining men to terrible self-denial in order to achieve high-production levels. It frees workers—allowing them to *decide* to be at leisure, but without sacrificing basic consumer goods. It could leave *time* to participate in decision-making and self-development.” Yet, like McKelvey’s contribution, this document contained within it the knowledge that the freedom promised by automation could only be unlocked alongside a broader social transformation. “The real question behind these possibilities,” SDS members posited, “is *who controls* the process, and how and for whom it will be used,” for the automation that had already taken place “emphasizes an economy

¹⁷Donald McKelvey, proposed substitution for the draft, July 30, 1963, series 2A, no. 3, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

operating *for* the few, run *by* the few—it accelerates oligopoly and elite rule of economic life.” By contrast, “if the promise of automation is to become reality, the celebration of ‘corporate government’ as the new ‘American way’ must be attacked at its core, and like other, older myths, destroyed by men and tools of reason.”¹⁸

In 1967, C.W. (Charlie) Smith offered yet another take on the threat and promise of automation. According to Doug Rossinow, Austin SDS member Smith was a disruptive, C. Wright Millsian figure who arrived “at an SDS National Council meeting in June 1964 on his motorcycle, declaring to the gathering of sober young radicals that he was a pacifist, an anarchist, a Marxist, and a beatnik.”¹⁹ The problem with capitalism, he argued three years later, was not production but rather “alienation, the estrangement of man from labor. The production worker of today is a dehumanized robot.” Alienation, moreover, was the problem of those lucky enough to *have* jobs—the poor and unemployed faced even greater struggles. Yet, Smith was confident that “we have it within our technical means to eliminate poverty overnight, give every person free medical care because human dignity demands it, rebuild our cities as fit places of human habitation, to insure every person a right to a job and an education to the limit of his ability.” Technology was the key to this transformation; as Smith argued, “all through history, man has been a prisoner of animal necessity. His development as a human being has been limited by the unending task of securing food, shelter and clothing. This was an unfortunate necessity when man was picking berries in the forest. But today, a new world of freedom, culture, and abundance is revealed through the new

¹⁸“A New Agenda for America,” series 2A, no. 3, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

¹⁹Doug Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 9-10.

technology... Today, the means of production have outgrown these shackles and must be set free to serve man.” Yet, scarcity-ending technology was only one of two components necessary to bring about the goal of “a new society; a society where the machine serves man, not man the machine.” The other, according to Smith, was socialism. However, the author was quick to clarify what he meant by socialism: it was decidedly not centralized, state-run economic planning, but rather a radical *decentralization* and democratization that gave people complete autonomy over their own lives. Only this more fundamental social transformation could bring about work that was “humanly satisfying and meaningful.”²⁰

Occasionally, faith in the liberating potential of automation was tempered by a strain of condescension toward the working classes. As a minister who worked with SDS on the issue noted, automation brought with it “the possibility of vast new freedom,” yet society seemed “to be seeking to find ways to avoid the freedom offered to us.” Echoing Fromm’s “escape from freedom,” he argued that the changes required were simply too vast and frightening for most to contemplate, with many choosing to retreat to the familiar alienation of wage labor. He compared workers to a (possibly apocryphal) tale of Alfred Dreyfus, a French military officer falsely convicted of treason in the 1890s. As he told it,

The story of the Dreyfus Affair in France includes a weird account of the group who went to Devils [*sic*] Island to announce to the prisoner, after many years in a tiny cell, that he has been declared innocent and was free. They opened the door of the rock-hewn cell and called for the prisoner to come out, and a horrible vestige of human being shambled apelike into the sunshine. On being told he was

²⁰C.W. (Charlie) Smith, “Some Perspectives for Socialist Youth,” 1967(?), series 2A, no. 130, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

free he first looked bewildered, blinking his eyes in the light, and finally with a sudden look of terror retreated into his prison.²¹

American workers (and, indeed, American society in general), he argued, were in a similar position: so accustomed to their prison that they would choose it over sunlight and freedom. Sentiments of this nature were surprisingly rare, although the broader argument that workers needed to be saved by middle-class, white radicals would likely not have received a warm welcome from its intended targets.

In 1964, a thirty-two-member “Ad Hoc Committee” consisting of Michael Harrington, the longtime social justice advocate best-known for highlighting the problems of poverty in 1962’s *The Other America*, SDSers Tom Hayden, main author of the organization’s Port Huron Statement and its president in 1962-3, and Todd Gitlin, Harvard graduate and University of Michigan graduate student who followed Hayden in that role, and several academics and labor activists, published an extensive treatise on the subject. Not solely an SDS publication, “The Triple Revolution” shows how cybernation (used interchangeably with automation throughout SDS literature), with its concomitant issues regarding humans and machines, concerned a broad swath of the 1960s intelligentsia and working class alike. The “triple” of the title referred to three wide-ranging changes taking place simultaneously: the human rights revolution, which was beginning to allow (in particular) African Americans to claim their rightful places in the social, political, and economic life of the country; the weaponry revolution, by which military *materiel* requiring vast numbers of assembly-line workers was being replaced by highly specialized equipment requiring only a few trained engineers and technicians; and

²¹Scott [?], *The New Meaning of Work in an Age of Cybernation*, undated, series 2B, no. 21, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

the cybernation revolution, in which technological developments were making it possible for employers to replace human workers with machines. Both published in the New Left journal *Liberation* and distributed by SDS and its ERAP projects, “The Triple Revolution” and the responses to it reached not only SDS members, but also the working-class constituency with whom they hoped to connect.²²

Taken together, the Ad Hoc Committee argued, these developments had the potential to spell either disaster or progress. In particular, the demands of the human rights revolution were at odds with the job losses that were the likely outcome of the second two. As the authors put it, “the demands of the civil rights movement cannot be fulfilled within the present context of society. The Negro is trying to enter a social community and a tradition of work-and-income which are in the process of vanishing even for the hitherto privileged [*sic*] worker. Jobs are disappearing under the impact of highly efficient, progressively less costly machines.” In other words, it was a “cruel and dangerous hoax” that African Americans were gaining greater access to jobs just as those jobs were disappearing. At the same time, as noted elsewhere in the literature, changes in military production were exacerbating these developments.²³

Again echoing much of the other SDS literature, “The Triple Revolution” framed cybernation as a nearly apocalyptic struggle between men, and it *was* men in their understanding of the issue, and machines. Invoking the specter of “the computer and the automated self-regulating machine,” the authors argued that “this country is the stage on which the Machines-and-Man drama will first be played for the world to witness.” As

²²Ad Hoc Committee, “The Triple Revolution: An Appraisal of the Major U.S. Crises and Proposals for Action,” 1964, series 4B, no. 2, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

²³Ibid.

the most technologically advanced country, the United States would be affected first by cybernation, although other nations would soon feel its effects. The fundamental problem with cybernation, the authors of “The Triple Revolution” argued, was that it undercut the system wherein only wage labor granted people access to scarce resources. As cybernation took hold, however, men, already engaged in a heretofore relatively equal struggle with machines, would be at a distinct disadvantage in competition for jobs. Then, money that previously would have been used to pay employees would increasingly be diverted to purchasing technology, and unemployed human workers would be forced to rely on underfunded public sector programs. If cybernation were allowed to run its natural course in a capitalist economy, the authors argued, the very technological developments that possessed the ability to *end* scarcity would actually *increase* privation for much of the population. Indeed, this had already begun to take place. The result, to use the authors’ evocative term, would be a “dehumanized community.” “Dehumanized” here invoked at least two different meanings: in the literal sense, an economic sector depopulated of human beings; in an abstract sense, a community in which people were being deprived of their humanity.²⁴

Yet, if thoughtful people could untether cybernation from the profit motive, it could be harnessed for almost unlimited good. Increased productivity had the potential to end not only scarcity, but also the model of work as an activity that brought in cash in order to purchase goods. With proper planning, the authors argued, cybernation could be implemented “rationally and humanely.” In part, seeing this potential required an intellectual reconfiguration, away from seeing machines in competition with human

²⁴Ibid.

workers and toward seeing machines as agents that could free human workers from having to engage in meaningless, dehumanizing labor. The hopeful world these authors imagined was one in which machines hummed along in the background producing an abundance of the goods needed for survival, while the humans who previously had been responsible for producing these goods were free instead to pursue other interests.

“Because of cybernation,” the authors of “The Triple Revolution” argued, “society needs no longer to impose repetitive and meaningless...toil upon the individual. Society can not [now?] set the citizen free to make his own choice of occupation and vocation from a wide range of activities not now fostered by our value system and our accepted modes of ‘work.’” What this meant was that “many creative activities and interests commonly thought of as non-economic will absorb the time and the commitment of many of those no longer needed to produce goods and services.” More, once individuals had escaped from the material exigencies that demanded a constant cycle of labor and recovery, people would be free to ponder deeper questions concerning of their existence. As the authors put it, “cybernation at last forces us to answer the historic questions: what is man’s role when he is not dependent upon his own activities for the material basis of his life? What should be the basis for distributing individual access to national resources? Are there proper claims on goods and services besides a job?” Cybernation could lay the groundwork for the emergence of a *true* democracy, “a community of men and women who are able to understand, express, and determine their lives as dignified human beings.” The end of scarcity would provide “the economic base for a true democracy of participation, in which men no longer need to feel themselves prisoners of social forces and decisions beyond their control or comprehension.”²⁵

²⁵Ibid.

In the meantime, an expanded, human- rather than thing-centered public sector would be needed to enable a smooth transition to this idealistic future. This transition would necessarily include spiritual changes such as “teaching and learning that relate people to people rather than people to things” as well as more conventional demands for increased public works, increased low-cost housing, the development of a rapid transit system, a public power system, changes to the tax structure, and the involvement of organized labor. The authors also suggested putting old military bases to community or educational use and insisted on government regulation of cybernation.²⁶ Unfortunately, the authors did not spell out what the post-scarcity, post-work world beyond this transitional period would look like, perhaps precluded by the presence of both leftists and mainstream liberals to go so far as to call for the complete abolition of private property and enterprise. As the next chapter will show, however, SDS members themselves were always careful to point out that they did not wish to abolish privacy.

In his response to “The Triple Revolution,” the eminent pacifist Dave Dellinger made even more explicit the claim that technology could be put in the service of a greater humanism. “More important than the development of machines that think like men,” he wrote, “is the development of men who think like human beings. If the first process can encourage the second, so much the better.” That is, though technology and capitalism working together had *denied* man his humanity by insisting that he participate in meaningless labor that alienated him from his true self, technology divorced from capitalism could actually *restore* his humanity and serve as a panacea for his alienation. As Dellinger put it, the authors of “The Triple Revolution” had issued a call “for a more

²⁶Ibid.

extensive application of humanism.” Machines, Dellinger wrote, had advanced far beyond humans in terms of sheer physical strength, and their brain power was steadily increasing. Yet, machines were no match for people on the grounds of what made them truly human, and indeed machines could, properly implemented, be used to restore that full humanity. The authors of “The Triple Revolution,” Dellinger insisted, “end by making a proposal which would restore man to his natural eminence as a person. They give him back his human heart, which has been all but denied him by competitive economics and poverty in the midst of affluence.” The demands of a capitalist wage economy, in other words, had denied people their true humanity, and cybernation—were its benefits distributed for the good of all people, not only the wealthy— could be harnessed to restore it.²⁷

Like the authors of “The Triple Revolution,” Dellinger believed, too, that cybernation could free man’s natural creativity. Anticipating criticisms that the end of coerced labor would lead to laziness, he “predict[ed] that it wouldn’t take long for most people to settle down and discover, in many cases for the first time, that the satisfaction of useful or challenging work are [*sic*] more fulfilling than those supposedly derived from either nonproductive idleness or alienated work and the putative rewards of status or luxury that, in theory at least, fall to the hardworking and conscientious.” Free to pursue their own interests and desires, people would work not because material survival demanded it but rather because, given “man’s natural joy in learning,” they wanted to.

²⁷Dave Dellinger, “Some Comments on the Proposals: Revolution and Water,” in “Triple Revolution, Together with Commentary by Dave Dellinger and Growing up Absorbed, Paul Goodman,” 1964, series 4B, no. 3, Students for a Democratic Society Papers. This piece was originally published in the April, 1964 edition of *Liberation*.

Cybernation, by blurring the boundaries between work and not-work, would allow people to explore, discover, and become the creative human beings they were intended to be.²⁸

Yet, Dellinger was disappointed that the authors of “The Triple Revolution” stopped short of calling for an actual revolution, but rather were content to echo the policy demands Progressives and liberals had been making for decades. Nor, even, was there the guarantee that the resources and programs they recommended would be implemented as basic human rights, available free of charge. However, many of his own suggestions—free medical care, a guaranteed annual income, additional monetary allotments for each child a family had, free milk for children (and eventually all people)—were much in the same vein as those offered in “The Triple Revolution,” albeit more focused on human health and happiness than on infrastructure development.²⁹ It seems that to Dellinger, what made the Ad Hoc Committee’s recommendations merely rehashed, if laudatory, liberalism and his own revolutionary was that, while the former group was primarily concerned with guaranteeing a stable transition to a new economy, he was focused on the recognition and fulfillment of basic human rights.

Paul Goodman, intellectual forefather of SDS best known for 1960’s *Growing up Absurd*, which young people saw as a condemnation of the repressive, conformist society in which they lived, made many of the same points as Dellinger. In a 1964 interview with Roger Ebert, then of the *Daily Illini*, Goodman argued that the demands of capitalism, which for survival depended on an ever-growing market, *required* that people lead unsatisfying lives: for if people were to engage in the activities that they truly found fulfilling—those activities that, in an obvious play on the title of his well-known book,

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid.

would allow for “growing up absorbed”—the economy would suffer. Since those truly absorbing, meaningful activities had little to no market value, people needed to be actively kept from pursuing them. As Goodman put it,

...if the great mass of the people, I feel, were allowed to spend their time in the way that really gave them the most satisfaction, I'm afraid the gross national product might be cut by as much as fifty per cent. It's a fantastic thing. Well then what does this mean for our society? It seems to me that, by and large, a chief purpose of our economy must be to prevent people from having the real satisfactions of life—the satisfactions which would enable them to grow, and be happy, and so on. That's a rather ghastly thought, isn't it?³⁰

Although he did not use the word alienation, Goodman clearly, like Dellinger, believed that the demands of a capitalist economy forced people to abandon their true selves, making it impossible for them to experience their full humanity.

Thus, one of the differences between the Old Left and New Left organizations such as SDS centered on different understandings of work and liberation. It was not that SDS members did not care about work. They perceived industrial work as deadening, mechanized, and consequently an impediment to autonomy, creative self-expression, and authenticity. As in the classical Marx/Engels formulation, they hoped to obviate the very need for an industrial labor force at all. Only then, freed from both the prison of work and the material exigencies of a capitalist economy, could people become the creative individuals they were meant to be. They conceived of these developments, however, not in terms of collective struggle and class consciousness, but of personal liberation.

³⁰Paul Goodman, “Growing up Absorbed,” in “Triple Revolution, Together with Commentary by Dave Dellinger and Growing up Absorbed, Paul Goodman,” 1964, series 4B, no. 3, Students for a Democratic Society Papers. This piece was previously published as an interview in the *Daily Illini* and in the April, 1964 edition of *Liberation*.

As discussed in chapter three, work and liberation were also intimately connected for Betty Friedan and other liberal feminists. But while the personal fulfillment that came from participating in creative labor was important to Friedan, paid work was most significant to her for the independence it would grant women *within* a wage-based economy. Here, then, were two competing visions of how to bring about the liberation of the self: for liberal feminists, it would come through paid work; for the younger men who dominated SDS, it would come through the elimination of the need for paid work entirely. Both groups were invested in attaining creative, personally fulfilling labor for each human being, but they differed in their visions of the broader economic structure under which such labor would take place. In many ways, this divide added a broader political awareness to the split between male and female Beats; while male Beats saw waged labor as an impediment to authentic living, female Beats necessarily saw it as the key to escaping from the narrow, conventional lives that they otherwise would have led.

Moreover, the SDS model clearly relied on an implicitly masculine understanding of the distinction between work (the activities for which one was paid) and not-work (creative, freely chosen pursuits that did not bring in an income), even as it tried to blur these boundaries. SDS's vision of an automated economy made no provisions for unpaid labor, refusing to acknowledge either who would cook, clean, secure the necessary provisions, and take care of children once the need for paid labor was eliminated *or* the fact that these tasks were often perceived as deeply alienating by those who performed them. Chapter eight will analyze a third version of the relationship between work and liberation articulated by the women's liberation movement.

Education

A young woman, alone in her dorm room, contemplates the endless line of books she must read and papers she must write. Taught all her life to “learn more, read more, know more,” she no longer feels a connection to any of the dull academic work surrounding her. “The question,” she felt, “was no longer ‘why care’ but ‘how to care’—how.” A glance inside the books that littered her room would reveal that “the print on each and every page was dry, hardened with time, deadened with life. Yes, dead with life.”³¹

A serious young man, devoted to learning as much as he can in his college courses, finds himself in front of three identical university administrators. They tell the young man that he has received a D in his government course and will not receive credit for it. Shocked, the young man protests that he received As on each and every assignment—facts corroborated by his instructor. The administrators do not deny this; rather, the young man’s academic achievement is utterly irrelevant to them: because the young man turned his add-slip in late, he needs to be penalized. The administrators insist that they are being lenient and that they could have given him an F. When the young man attempts to challenge their decision, they coldly expel him from the university.³²

Although fictional, the above accounts—evocatively titled “Dead with Life” and “Carbon Copies”—go far toward explaining the problems SDS members ascribed to higher education. Cut off from any knowledge that seemed relevant to their lives, university students drifted through their days in zombie-like states. Forced to navigate

³¹“Dead with Life,” undated, series 2A, no. 130, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

³²“Carbon Copies,” undated, series 2A, no. 130, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

through miles of bureaucratic red tape and utterly beholden to the whims of university administrators, students were graded not on how much they learned but on how successfully they fulfilled obscure administrative tasks. Ultimately, SDSers argued, the goal of the university was turning unique individuals into docile servants of the corporation and the military-industrial complex. It was a “knowledge factory” whose only goal was producing workers. In doing so, the university took away students’ individuality and made them into exact replicas of one another, turning authentic humans into mechanized automatons allowed no freedom of thought. Inspired by the Berkeley Free Speech Movement, where student and civil rights movement veteran Mario Savio urged his fellows to “put your bodies upon the gears” of the dehumanizing machine of society, SDS turned its attention starting in 1965 to developing an alternative to the current educational model, one that would allow them to be more than just cogs in a machine. For those young people who “didn’t spend their school years just to become a robot,” as a pamphlet aimed at college graduates read, SDS was the place to be.³³

Members envisioned an educational system that would undo the years and decades of social training that had turned people into machines alienated from their true selves. Theirs was ultimately a de-programming or de-brainwashing mission. Stripped of learned obedience, passivity, and complacency, students would be able not only to question the system that they had been taught to accept, but also would, for the first time, be truly human. This de-programming mission, however, was rooted not in postmodern deconstruction but rather in a deeply-felt individualistic humanism. SDS members never doubted that each person had a true, core self that lay buried under layer upon layer of

³³Pamphlet, Possibilities for the Graduate, undated, series 4C, no. 1, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

learned behavior and that could be expressed if this deleterious training was undone. This unshakeable faith in a core or true authentic self was also connected to SDS members' suspicion of systematic thought—at least in the early 1960s. No ideology or economic system, be it capitalism or Marxism, could hope to compete with the unimpeachable truth of individual experience. To put one's faith in a system above and beyond the evidence of individual human thought, emotion, and experience was simply to recreate the devaluation of individuality that these radical young people found so repugnant in the current system. The goal set by SDS members who hoped to alter the U.S. educational system was thus nothing less than freeing the individual from the repressive shackles of a dehumanizing society. Unfortunately, the group would lack the infrastructure necessary to bring about such sweeping changes; nor, as the Vietnam War came to eclipse the organization's other concerns starting in 1965, would they have the will to pursue such a program for very long or with much vigor.

The nature of education and the position of students had always been of concern to SDS. The issue was first formally addressed at two conferences held in late 1962 and early 1963. Even before that, in the first draft of what eventually became the Port Huron Statement—a manifesto guided, in this and other ways, by disillusionment springing from the vast gulf between American ideologies and American realities—Tom Hayden, the soon-to-be-elected SDS president whose experiences with higher education came at the University of Michigan, expressed the frustration he and his cohort felt at the university's failure to provide an adequate model for engagement with the world. “We are in the universities,” he wrote, “but gain little enlightenment there—the old promise that knowledge and increased rationality would liberate society seems hollow, if not a

lie.” They found in the universities not only a system that was slow to change, but also one in which the leaders—professors and administrators—were beholden to archaic ideas about useful knowledge and “objective” inquiry and, worse, to serving the interests of the military. The human, existential questions students most wanted raised—“What is really important? Can we live better than this? How should we be as people?”—were deemed unworthy of time and study. “The real question,” as Hayden put it, concerned not so much the specific failures of the university, but rather, echoing Kerouac, “whether or not society contains *any* prophets who can speak in language and concept that is authentic for us, that can make luminous the inner self that burns for understanding.”³⁴ Hayden’s concerns would inform SDS’s efforts to remake education when they took up the issue with gusto three years later.

Work to supplement a traditional university education was at this time being done by places like the New School in San Francisco and the Free University of New York. In San Francisco, the New School was founded in January 1964 by a group of “radical intellectuals and professionals” identifying themselves as the San Francisco Opposition. These men and women hoped that the content of their courses, which included critical analyses of American imperialism, would spur the roughly one hundred students enrolled each term—an eclectic mix of “students from Berkeley, secretaries who had nothing better to do on Wednesdays, old lefties, union guys, etc.”—to take action in their communities. These courses were further supplemented by guest lectures from prominent individuals such as I.F. Stone, Susan Sontag, Paul Krasner, and Lawrence Ferlinghetti. Yet, this work seemed to reap few rewards; by January 1965, the original

³⁴Tom Hayden, “Manifesto Notes: A Beginning Draft,” Convention Document #1, March 19, 1962, series 1, no. 6, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

founders of the New School were ready to fold, convinced that their work “had nothing to do with what was going on in the real world...had nothing to do with the movement.” At that point, SDS took over the operation. In addition to raising money for longer-term research projects, they planned to resume courses in the fall of 1965, despite being unsure as to “what value courses can be.”³⁵

In New York, the Free University was founded “in response to the Cold War and the Garrison State” and “in revolt against the bankrupt educational establishment.” Those involved, including Stanley Aronowitz, Paul Krassner, Sharon and Allen Krebs, and Staughton Lynd, sought “passionate involvement with the forbidden ideas of our generation.”³⁶ The FUNY group essentially saw the traditional university as an instrument of totalitarian mind control. As they put it,

American universities have been reduced to institutions of intellectual servitude. Students...are treated like raw materials to be processed for the university’s clients—business, government, and military bureaucracies. Teachers, underpaid and constantly subject to investigation and purge, have been relegated to the position of servant-intellectuals, required, for regular promotion, to propagate points of view in harmony with the military and industrial leadership of our society.³⁷

In part, this view derived from the personal experiences of its instructors. Director Allen Krebs had been fired from his job at Adelphi College in Long Island after a trip to Cuba, prompting him to argue that “established universities are setting up a kind of neo-czarist form of censorship over what is being taught.” Another instructor, Robert Sitton, was fired from his position in the philosophy department at Brooklyn College for rescinding a

³⁵SDS New School (San Francisco) to Richard Horevitz, July 26, 1965, series 2A, no. 42, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

³⁶Flier “Announcing the Opening of the Free University of New York,” series 2A, no. 42, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

³⁷Catalogue, The Free University of New York, summer, 1965, series 2A, no. 42, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

loyalty oath. This censorship of faculty members, as a FUNY catalogue argued, was symptomatic of a broader problem: the fact that “the American University has been emasculated...Students have been systematically dehumanized, deemed incompetent to regulate their own lives, sexually, politically, academically.” FUNY offered alternatives to the traditional university system in the form of courses on the theory and practice of community organization, the struggle for Vietnamese independence, and the American radical tradition. In what would become a hallmark of SDS thought on the issue, FUNY’s equation of emasculation and dehumanization contained within it the implication that (inherently masculine) resistance was needed to counter the (inherently feminine) docility traditional universities inculcated in students.³⁸

The Free University of Florida was one such place that tried to provide this much-needed form of resistance. Describing itself in contrast to “that ‘university of conscripts’ the current mood of which is a demoralizing combination of factory and rebellion,” its founder drew particular inspiration from the Berkeley Free Speech movement. Made into a combination of draftees and assembly-line workers (or, more ominously, factory-farmed animals), students had no control over their own learning. By contrast, FUF presented itself as a “freedom-spirited community” whose members “choose to work for the renewal of the collegiate experience—to make it engaging, lively, and more spontaneously relevant to themselves and the world outside those campus gates.” Culling volunteer instructors from local universities, FUF offered a wide variety of courses including not only the oft-neglected histories of social movements, marginalized peoples, and political ideologies deemed subversive, but also real-life skills such as reading the

³⁸Vivien Brown, Press Release, Collegiate Press Services, series 2A, no. 42, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

newspaper, hands-on experience in “selected poverty areas,” and training in spontaneity and sensitivity through improvisational theatre workshops. Citing John Dewey, its organizers noted that democracy entails “a freedom which is cooperative and a cooperation which is voluntary,” going on to argue that they hoped to increase people’s control over both the educations they received and the lives they led. FUF, however, was quite open in their desire not to replace but to coexist with the traditional university system. As a flier put it, “no student would drop out of a regular university to attend FUF, anymore than a secretary quits her job when she enrolls in classes at the YMCA.” Rather, FUF was a place in which frustrated students and teachers from the traditional university could come together “in search of something that is missing where they work.” Thus, they challenged neither the usefulness of the traditional university nor its narrow definition of students.³⁹

Although many SDS members were involved in these supplementary initiatives, they experienced nagging feelings that “something was wrong” with that model, eventually coming to see such programs as failures. As Richard Horevitz, assigned in 1965 to direct the newly-established Free University Committee out of the SDS National Office, put it regarding the Free University of New York, “I believe that it fails to produce by its existence a radical (in the traditional meaning of the word) critique of the educational system in America. It deals with superficialities and not the root problems.”⁴⁰ He took a similar position on the San Francisco New School, which,

³⁹Flier, Free University of Florida, 1965, series 2A, no. 42, Students for a Democratic Society Papers; The Free University of Florida: A Summary Prospectus, series 2A, no. 42, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

⁴⁰Richard Horevitz to Dr. Harold Taylor, July 17, 1965, series 2A, no. 42, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

although producing analysis “sorely need[ed]” by the movement, “does not meet the criteria for a ‘free university’” because “it presupposes far too much about the nature of education, the purpose of education and its relationship to people and society, to be a really radical experiment.”⁴¹ Although a practical blueprint for implementing Horevitz’s and SDS’s preferred radical reworking of the educational system never came to fruition, organization members did generally agree on two aspects of the hypothetical future they imagined. First, the free university should be open to those not usually considered students. This often led to proposing autonomous communities in which people from different walks of life lived, worked, and learned together in self-directed ways. Second, and more importantly for my purposes, the goal of the free university was for people to become more fully human: freer, more expressive, and more authentic.

An advertisement for the “Free Student,” a publication in support of the “May 2nd” or free university movement, made this position abundantly clear.⁴² The student movement, this flier argued, was opposed not only to the war in Vietnam or the broader pattern of U.S. imperialism, but also to an educational system that left most citizens passive in the face of such developments. In particular, they singled out “factory education, which trains students not to think, but how to comfortably fit into the giant corporations which support and rule the Universities; and how to apologize for the system with the sophistication which only a University education can bring.” Students,

⁴¹Richard Horevitz to Carolyn Craven, July 28, 1965, series 2A, no. 42, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

⁴²May 2, 1964, marked some of the first large-scale student anti-war protests.

in other words, were trained to be docile, unthinking cogs in the well-oiled machines of corporate capitalism and the military-industrial complex.⁴³

What would an institution capable of standing up to these powerful forces look like? Marv Holloway of the Washington, D.C. SDS offered one plan. The current system, he argued, left large numbers of students “existentially alienated...functionally separate from meaning on the campus.” Education itself was “bureaucratic and mechanized,” “heavily ordered by the corporate Establishment.” Mainstream liberals’ plans for educational reform were no better; similar to the way many leftists criticized University of California president Clark Kerr’s “proto-fascist” tendencies, Holloway poked derisive fun at the prospect of a “Lyndonized” (with convenient similarities to “mechanized”) educational system, obviously a jab at the president. SDS members had no quarrel with federal funding for higher education *per se*—indeed, as the above section on automation makes clear, increased funding for education was one of the key developments necessary to ease the transition to a post-work economy—rather protesting higher education’s complicity with the military-industrial complex and the refusal of mainstream liberals to allow students more control over their own educations. Given these circumstances, radicals were seen as the only hope to bring about “education with human meaning.”⁴⁴

Holloway’s alternative vision brought together three groups of people: faculty members devoted to “more human oriented methods of teaching”; a diverse collection of

⁴³Flier, “May 2nd Movement,” series 2A, no. 42, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

⁴⁴Marv Holloway, On the Free University, 1965, series 2A, no. 16, Students for a Democratic Society Papers. On Kerr, see, for example, Hal Draper, “Clark Kerr: The Liberal as Proto-Fascist,” series 4B, no. 79, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

“searchers” united in “their quest for education with meaning”; and the poor, previously shut out of universities due to a lack of both material and cultural currency. Properly engaged, these groups could help break down the structures, systems, and patterns that limited the university’s relevance. Rather than attempting to impose their own agendas on students, teachers would explore and respond to actual community needs, and thus could feel confident that “their work would be of objective social use rather than continually conveying patterns upon the community according to Establishment prescriptions.” “Searchers” were sensitive, often creative people—including, in Holloway’s words, “intellectuals, eggheads, researchers, artists, [and] social changers”—whose potential was stymied by the need to “sell out” in order to make a living. The free university would be a place where they could “brighten their talents without controls from jingle writing contractors and advertising agents.” By nature “seriously motivated individuals working toward mature intellectual development,” searchers would find in a revitalized educational system a way to break free from the “freedomless structures, imposing ideas and ideologies, [and] dysfunctional mechanisms” that made it impossible for them to “put...forth new and usable forms.” Meanwhile, poorer members of the free university community could (Holloway wrote with a hint of condescension) attain “development, relevancy, and creativity,” while more privileged members could learn from the experiences of the poor.⁴⁵

Holloway’s vision of the free university could be said to have an anti-systematic, indeed perhaps even an anti-ideological, bent. In this way, his plan comported nicely with the broader SDS belief that *only* those truths that emanated from the individual were at all useful. Indeed, Holloway called for the “immediate disbanding of all forms of

⁴⁵Ibid.

ordering,” possibly including course requirements and prerequisites, the division of knowledge into discrete disciplines, and even the hierarchical relationships among students and teachers. In order to “bring the university back to a position of relevance to humanity and society,” received systems of knowledge would need to be rejected. Useful knowledge would be redefined as information that emanated from people’s experiences and responded to their needs. The “reality of the community” and the “pressing need of its constituents” would become the only salient concerns.⁴⁶

Another vision for the free university, co-authored by Larry Gordon, a veteran of the Newark ERAP and a 1965 nominee for SDS president (he was defeated by Carl Oglesby), came out of Swarthmore SDS in Pennsylvania. This plan drew heavily on the guiding principle that would later be termed the theory of the new working class: the idea that students occupied a particularly marginalized place in society and, because of that marginalization, were positioned to be the true agents of social change. Before any sort of free university could be implemented, the Swarthmore group argued, a political transformation needed to take place. More specifically, people needed to be disillusioned, as SDSers already had been, about the reality of American life: rather than a liberal paragon of freedom, democracy, and equality, the United States was an agent of imperialism and a nation deeply plagued by racism and poverty. Yet, this realization was not dependent on firsthand exposure to the living conditions of the poor and/or people of color. Rather, by the mid-1960s SDS was moving toward the position that the university itself was the perfect place to inculcate radicalism. As the Swarthmore group put it, “perhaps the time has come when that process [of disillusionment] can go on rapidly in

⁴⁶Ibid.

other places beside the ghetto...Perhaps students on the campus are learning as much about the hollowness of what they have been taught to call democracy as they ever learned in the streets of Albany Ga. or Chester [PA],” the sites of civil rights and ERAP activism, respectively.⁴⁷

But if the university were likely to lead to the disillusionment necessary to incite action, it was also the perfect place to carry out this action. If the collective frustrations of both undergraduate and graduate students and young teachers could be harnessed against the present university structure, “a school could be build [*sic*]...which would constitute an environment whose intellectual content would be as challenging as the content of the ghetto.” The school would be a place where, rather than teachers as authority figures who jealously guarded their expertise and students as passive recipients of information, both groups worked together to create knowledge. In order to best serve the real needs of students and others, each member of the university community would also be engaged in administration of the institution. The free university would also need to be engaged with rather than cut off from the broader community.⁴⁸

Yet, as was frequently the case in SDS literature, the Swarthmore group was quick to disassociate itself from the suggestion of overly systematic thought. Anticipating “protest[s] that this sounds much like a proposal for an ideological institute which attempts to teach a certain political line,” the authors responded that, while there was a political element to the concept of the free university, the goal was not to proselytize but rather to give people the tools to better deal with the actual conditions of

⁴⁷Nick [?] and Larry Gordon, Notes on the Free University, spring 1965, series 2A, no. 42, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

⁴⁸Ibid.

their own lives. That is, the free university would be rooted in the realities of people's actual lives, not overarching ideologies attempting to explain these realities. At the same time, these free university theorists perceived no conflict in ignoring the actual lives of those who lived in ghettos.⁴⁹

In contrast to the Swarthmore group, Barry Bluestone, a University of Michigan student who would later be a full-time staff member in the Radical Education Project, focused not on the special problems and opportunities faced by students already in universities, but rather on the people generally not granted access to these institutions. "I start with the premise," he wrote, "that I want every person to have the ability to develop to the maximum potential he wishes to develop to... That everyone be able to do what he wishes to (of course limited to not interfering [*sic*] with others [*sic*] desires. That means in effect that if a migrant laborer picking cherries in Northern [*sic*] Michigan wishes rather to paint in water colors, then he should be able to do that." To Bluestone, the university was less an institution of formal learning and more a useful analogy for a new set of social relations. In the concrete, geographical center of the free university, students "of all ages and all walks of life... the engineer-scientist and the migrant laborer" could explore subjects in which they were interested. Yet, the broader significance of the free university—in which people were free to choose their own paths and cultivate their own interests—was as a model for what communities across the region and nation could look like. In its focus on the autonomous pursuit of meaningful activity, the free university would serve as both an example of participatory democracy and a place where students would learn the skills necessary to implement this vision elsewhere. As will be discussed

⁴⁹Ibid.

in more depth in the next chapter, the SDS vision for participatory democracy rested fundamentally on the expression of the authentic, individual self that Bluestone and others hoped the free university would inculcate. Bluestone's vision also seemed implicitly to rest on the post-scarcity, post-work world that SDSers hoped automation would help bring to fruition. Clarifying his position on whom the university would serve, for example, Bluestone was quick to point out that "occupations like migrant labor, when I use them in this paper, are referring to categories of people that exist now, now under the new system necessarily and probably not." The free university, he implied, would both benefit from and further the development of this new system.⁵⁰

More explicitly than Barry Bluestone, Barry Weisberg, an SDS stalwart who in the late 1960s would consistently defend the "Old Guard" against the onslaughts of more ideological, militant factions, made it clear that the importance of an educational system based on autonomy and choice lay partly in how it would distinguish the free university from the current system, in which people were molded to fit the needs of institutions rather than the other way around. As he saw it, the problem was not just classes that were too large to do anything other than passively receive knowledge or a grading system that rarely took into account actual learning. Rather, these were symptoms of a bigger problem: the fact that "current institutions produce people to fit vast *[sic]* economic complexes, people who do not participate politically or otherwise, people without self-respect or able to lead a creative imaginative life." The current university system, he argued, did little more than "stifle *[sic]*" its students. By contrast, he hoped the free university would be a place "which allows people to develop in the manner they see fit,"

⁵⁰Barry Bluestone to "Leslie [Woodcock], Rich [Horevitz], et. al.," July 27, 1965, series 2A, no. 42, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

a place in which “students are seen as people capable of making decisions for themselves and having a say so in their lives.”⁵¹

Weisberg expanded on this vision in a piece titled “One Man, One Soul.” After reiterating the problems of universities that controlled every aspect of students’ lives and of a broader social system that made all humans into “cogs in a machine,” he argued for what he called a “community of confusion” or a “cafeteria of humanity.” Education would be determined not by rigid course, major, and disciplinary requirements but by people’s individual interests and desires, even if these interests were scattered and eclectic. The category of student would be expanded to include all who wished to learn, while the category of knowledge would be expanded to include categories conventionally thought of as non-academic, such as art and carpentry. Education, moreover, would be an egalitarian rather than top-down pursuit, with students and teachers together “striving to develop adequate definitions of reality.” Ultimately, the free university would be “a place where people would give self direction to their development,” in direct contrast to the restrictive dictates of the traditional university.⁵²

Others extended this emphasis on individual autonomy even further. Deeply influenced by Paul Goodman, one SDSer argued in response to Barry Bluestone that the “central problem” of the current social structure was its “unfreedom.” Thus, the main goal of the free university must be to “find a way for people to be free, to be human.” Because it focused solely on narrowly-prescribed intellectual discipline at the expense of creative, emotional, or practical development, this author argued, the university produced

⁵¹ Barry Weisberg to Lawrence H. Davis, July 27, 1965, series 2A, no. 42, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

⁵² Barry Weisberg, “One Man, One Soul,” 1965, series 2A, no. 45, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

“stunted” human beings cut off from their true potential and true selves. People did not know how to respond to the world around them in basic sensory ways, nor did they possess the skills to express the truth of their experiences in a creative fashion. In other words, “we are really ‘unfree’—not because we do not have the potential to express the thoughts and feelings within us—and to express them in very beautiful and unusual ways—but because we have never learned to use this potential.” As a corrective to this problem, the author believed that all people should learn the skills of craftspeople and artists, who were able, respectively, to exercise control over their lives through physical skill and express through art what they were truly feeling.⁵³ Similarly, in a paper presented at the fall 1965 SDS National Convention, John Downey argued that by offering the physical training usually only available to artists and athletes, the free university could “release the emotional life of the individual” and allow students to “express thoughts and desires” kept hidden by the carefully-prepared self-presentation they otherwise chose to share with the world.⁵⁴ Only by escaping from the narrow intellectualism of the traditional university, in other words, could people tap into and express their true selves and become truly human.

Richard Horevitz’s own vision for the free university, captured in a report from this same convention, also addressed with some urgency the troubling compartmentalization of the human experience. He bemoaned the “estrangement between the arts and politics in the twentieth century,” noting that SDSers’ frequently-made claims to being avant-garde and/or existentialist were meaningless unless they embraced

⁵³To “Blue and Other People,” July 29, 1965, series 2A, no. 42, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

⁵⁴John Downey, “Experiments and Assum[p]tions in the Free University,” fall 1965, series 3, no. 86, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

the full meaning of these terms, with an awareness of how they were used in the art world. In other words, Horevitz argued, the art world offered an alternative to the cold, unfeeling, over-intellectual tradition of “British empiricism and analytic philosophy, and American pragmatism,” which “we say we are not a part of.” Indeed, part of his trouble with the San Francisco New School was that he saw them as squarely located within this tradition. Rather, he aligned himself with “continental philosophy from Hegel to Nietzsche and Kierkegaard and Marx, to modern existentialism,” a tradition that “calls for radically new relationships between people, for an environment that brings out the essential ambiguity of human reality and that allows men, as individuals, to experiment with the freedom to build their own lives, which is not their *right*, but their *reality*.”⁵⁵

The significance of Horevitz’s perspective lies in the dichotomy he drew between analysis and experience, between intellectualism and emotion. The conclusions that emanated from cold intellectual analysis, he believed, could not match the more authentic truths produced by artistic endeavors. The proper role of self-identified political people was thus not to lead, but to follow the example of the “truly radical and sensitive, the artist, writer, musician, and poet.” The free university should be at its heart a place where people could learn to live like artists. Students (broadly writ) should cultivate, among other qualities, the “fire of Ginsburg [*sic*] and Ferlinghetti, . . . the need for experimentation of Picasso, Ives, Schoenberg, Dali, Kandinsky, Mondrian and Hesse, [and] the ‘truth’ of Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Kafka, T.H. White, Adler[,] etc.” Much has been made, and correctly so, of SDS’s constant intellectualism, particularly (as chapter eight will show) in relation to how such analyses were used to denigrate the truths of women’s

⁵⁵Richard Horevitz to Carolyn Craven, July 28, 1965, series 2A, no. 42, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

experiences, and so Horevitz's perspective is particularly interesting. Although his vision seems to have lost out amid the increased militancy of the late 1960s (and there is no evidence to suggest that his concept of "truth" was any less gender-specific than the hard lines drawn by the Weathermen or the Maoist PL factions), this emphasis on truth, emotion, and experience was an important strain in SDS thought in at least the first several years of the organization's existence. Indeed, Horevitz believed that the pursuit of experiential learning was the true meaning of participatory democracy, and he saw a free university built around this concept as representing "a symbolic and also real representation of our goals for society." It would be "experimental as well as democratic (for what, really, is the difference), imaginative as well as un[r]epressive." The broader social changes that SDS sought, in other words, were only possible if human beings were given the chance to integrate and express both their intellectual and emotional selves.⁵⁶

As Horevitz himself realized, implementing such a vision in practical, concrete terms would not be easy. Like others, he recommended a curriculum of courses that focused on sensory experiences, including cooking, music, and wood- and metal working. These categories, however, were only "one level of creativity and experimentation." Beyond practical skills, he hoped to grant individuals the freedom to "experiment with ideas, thoughts, [and] emotions." The free university, he believed, must fight the repressive tendencies of modern society; rather than seeing their inner thoughts and feelings as unacceptable, people must learn both to embrace and express

⁵⁶Ibid.

their “internal and psychological li[ves].” Finally, the free university must be a place in which individuals learned new, more honest ways of relating to one another.⁵⁷

In a letter to Leslie Woodcock, who was working with Horevitz on the free university issue in the SDS national office, Art Rosenblum, who in 1967 would be a nominee for the position of SDS Education Secretary, further expanded on the ideas of honesty and interpersonal connection. First, though, he believed that the “free” in the moniker free university needed to be clarified and defined. As he pointed out, “‘free’ is a word that has been used so much in this country that everyone is supposed to know what it means. We speak of ‘freedom’ but we are rarely specific. *From* what do we want to be free, and *for* what do we want to be free?” To Rosenblum, the most important freedom was freedom “from hate and dishonesty.” Accordingly, the free university would need to be “a school that takes in the whole of life and deals with real problems on the basis of complete honesty.” Only when individuals were able to wash away everything false, inauthentic, and hypocritical would they possess the skills necessary to become more than “the big and little wheels which the capitalist machine requires.” Only then would they possess the courage and skills necessary to participate in a “real democracy.”⁵⁸

Practically speaking, Rosenblum foresaw a program in which students and teachers rented or bought a home for communal living and learning purposes, with money and resources pooled. Compounding the tensions that would inevitably arise from this economic structure would be the “complete honesty” Rosenblum demanded, echoing the calls for self-disclosure issued by Actors’ Equity, Tennessee Williams, and Jack

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Art Rosenblum, “The Free University,” in Art Rosenblum to Leslie Woodcock, August 24, 1965, series 2A, no. 42, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

Kerouac. Being forced to deal with others in relation to inherently contentious issues, Rosenblum argued, would allow community members to shed the falsehoods otherwise inculcated in them and come to enjoy “a truer life.” The free university would thus be both a model and a training ground for a new society.⁵⁹

Aside from small experiments both on and off traditional university campuses, though, SDS had trouble implementing their hopeful vision for a community of learners. Many of their early initiatives, moreover, involved bringing people together specifically to talk about what the free university should be, rather than implementing aspects of its agenda. Competing visions made it difficult to move forward in a concrete way. In the spring of 1965, for example, SDS was making plans to bring together between fifteen and twenty people to spend the summer experimenting with different ideas for future projects, yet they had no clear idea of what the goals of those projects would or should be. At that time, the various conceptions of what the free university should be and do included a place where people could deal with societal issues such as the pursuit of meaningful activity in the age of automation, a pre-college experience intended to train young people to be activists and reformers on their more traditional campuses, a community-organizing project, and an intellectual retreat. Some people believed it should include all of these aspects.⁶⁰ By the middle of that summer, however, little progress had been made. In fact, Richard Horevitz was shocked even to discover that steps had been taken without his knowledge toward organizing a summer workshop, a failure he attributed to Carolyn Craven, who had dropped out of Goucher College in 1964 to work in the SDS national

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Carolyn Craven to Art Waskow, May 3, 1965, series 2A, no. 42, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

office before moving to San Francisco, where she worked with both SDS and the New School, the following year.⁶¹ As he put it with some frustration,

For the last four years SDS has talked about “university reform.” The idea was to somehow make the university more democratic, both internally and with its relationships to society; to change the debilitating way in which the knowledge process is conducted in most universities; to make knowledge “relevant” to the society in which the university exists; and to make the university a “good” place to live and work. It escapes no one that we have failed to do so, and with only a few exceptions have not radically altered the educational system in America.⁶²

The vibrant discourse that sprang up around the idea of the free university in the spring and summer of 1965, including a workshop at the June national convention; a multi-day meeting that same month; and several extended treatises on the subject, could not even produce a concrete plan to share with the National Council at their September meeting.⁶³

Given that the report that came out of these workshops and meetings produced more questions than answers, this failure is not surprising. Reluctant to state what, exactly, the free university was (the closest they came was to call it “a process of de-brainwashing which must take place before there is free education”), the authors of the SDS University Committee report instead chose to define it as the answer to a series of questions. “The free university,” they argued, “is not defined by a particular structural arrangement, but by the questions the participants ask about its character.” If, as they saw it, “the ‘slave’ university is a product of the question ‘What are the necessary relationships between people and people and people and objects...that will produce

⁶¹Richard Horevitz to Walt [Popper], July 19, 1965, series 2A, no. 42, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

⁶²Richard Horevitz to Dr. Harold Taylor, July 17, 1965, series 2A, no. 42, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

⁶³Leslie Woodcock to Craig Livingston, July 27, [1965?], series 2A, no. 42, Students for a Democratic Society Papers; Richard Horevitz to Carolyn Craven, July 17, 1965, series 2A, no. 42, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

people well adjusted to the society; people who will continue to lead that society?," the free university must answer the question, "What kind of inter-personal relationships allow people to treat each other as human beings?" Yet, the authors cautioned that one must not proceed "mechanistically" from this question to blueprints for free university structure and content, for the answers were not self-evident.

First, the architects of any free university experiment would need to determine whether education was to be experiential or instrumental in nature or, in the authors' words, whether form or content was to be emphasized. Was the most important goal of the free university the "breaking down of the barriers that exist between people," or was it developing the knowledge and skills necessary to identify and fight the ills of modern society? This question, in turn, raised others, particularly the issue of what constituted useful knowledge. Before a free university could exist, its members would need to consider the value of both artistic and manual labor and the power relations inherent in abstract intellectualism. These questions were answered in different ways by the models proposed by several of the individuals involved in drafting the report and commissioned to do further research on the topic, including Barry Weisberg, who was hired by SDS to travel throughout the east and collect information on campus activism, and Swarthmore graduate and former Trenton ERAP director Walt Popper, who was conducting research on the university power structure.⁶⁴

The free university was also not a project SDS pursued with vigor for very long; even as the idea was getting off the ground in 1965, the organization was beginning to turn its attention more single-mindedly toward the war in Vietnam, eclipsing many of

⁶⁴Report of the SDS University Committee, June 28-30, 1965, series 2A, no. 45, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

their community-organizing initiatives in the process. An SDS-sponsored free university planned for the summer of 1966 never materialized.⁶⁵ By 1967, the flurry of organizing activity around the idea of a free university had been all but subsumed by the Radical Education Project, largely an intellectual exercise that focused on writing papers, organizing conferences, and bringing sympathetic people into the movement.⁶⁶ From that point on, changes to the educational system were mostly talked about rather than actively pursued.

Yet, the vitriol of some of these later discussions makes them worthy of further attention. It was, for example, in 1967's "The University" that Allen Krebs of the Free University of New York used the strongest language to explain his position. The ultimate goal of the traditional university, he wrote in the pages of *Treason!*, FUNY's quarterly, was "people-engineering." In a clear allusion to totalitarianism, he condemned universities as operating "in the best tradition of the total institution of the century." In his view, the educational system was designed not to aid students' intellectual, moral, and social development but rather to produce well-trained robots capable of perpetuating corporate capitalism and U.S. imperialism. Krebs then went on to offer perhaps the clearest articulation of the "cogs in a machine" argument:

The kind of creature the system is interested in producing is a spectre: the furthest limit of its volition is the selection of its own embodiment from among the stock images available at the newsstands and bookstores and from the worlds of contemporary entertainment and TV. This is the supermarket raised to its highest and most noble level—one in which shoppers shop not for products but for selves, seeking in each case the best machine-made reproduction of an idealized being.

⁶⁵Pamphlet, "What Is the Free University?," 1965, series 2A, no. 42, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

⁶⁶Draft for Discussion and Comment, March 20, 1966, series 3, no. 1, Students for a Democratic Society Papers; Tentative Outline Program for the Radical Education Project, August 1967 to August 1968, series 3, no. 107, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

Here on the shelves, free from blights, cancers, and blemishes, from the efforts expended on do-it-yourself products, sit the sculpted persons cut to the highest possible socio-psychological exactitude by the research trolls.⁶⁷

In other words, identity had become referential, something to be purchased ready-made from a limited variety of models. People were turned from individuals into mass-produced, standardized, replaceable products. By phrasing it just so, Krebs' analysis makes clear just how close the 1960s critique of education as a totalitarian institution that reduced citizens to brainwashed consumers of mass culture was to the 1950s fear that brainwashed consumers of mass culture were susceptible to totalitarian influence. At the same time, this analysis bore much in common with the 1950s fear that corporate capitalism was turning middle-class men into identity-less, interchangeable men in gray flannel suits. In each case, the problem was machine-like conformity, and the solution was reclaiming one's true, authentic, individual self.

Similarly, Penn State University graduate and then-SDS Vice President Carl Davidson described the current educational system as "authoritarian, conformist, and almost entirely status oriented." Borrowing from Berkeley Free Speech Movement leader Mario Savio and others, he condemned the university as a "knowledge factory" concerned only with producing workers. The end result of the "rationalizing and dehumanizing" that took place within the university system in response to the demands of "the state, industry, and the military" was a form of education that had become merely "the mechanistic process of homogenous, uncritical absorption of 'data' and job skills." Universities were "becoming appendages to, and transformed by, U.S. corporate capitalism." Cut off from reality, students were "being conditioned for life in a lifeless,

⁶⁷Allen Krebs, "The University," 1967, series 4B, no. 206, Students for a Democratic Society Papers. The piece was originally published in the summer 1967 issue of *Treason!*

stagnant, and sterile society.” Importantly, Davidson noted that the way to combat this detachment from reality was through “an ongoing *practical-critical activity* over and above any allegiance to theoretical certitude,” emphasizing like so many of his fellows that only individual experiences, not overarching theories, were useful barometers of truth. Accordingly, he believed that “education should be the process of developing the free, autonomous, creative and responsible *individual*—the ‘citizen,’ in the best sense of the word.” The connection between education and citizenship will be explored more thoroughly in the next chapter.⁶⁸

The most scathing critique by far came from Jerry Farber, whose 1967 “The Student as N—er: How to Be Slaves” was published by the Los Angeles Free Press and widely circulated among the country’s young people. In a metaphor equal parts mixed, potent, and problematic, Farber argued that students learned to be slaves through the “Auschwitz approach to education” practiced in the United States.⁶⁹ Echoing Tennessee Williams’s critiques of psychiatry, Farber wrote that, trained to trust authorities more than their own senses, students learned to “write like they’ve been lobotomized” and to blindly follow orders. Ultimately, he argued, “what school amounts to...for white and black kids alike, is a 12-year course in how to be slaves. What else could explain what I see in a freshman class? They’ve got that slave mentality: obliging and ingratiating on the surface but hostile and resistant underneath.” Both hyperbolic and deeply troubling, Farber’s false equivalence among slavery and the Holocaust on the one hand and the

⁶⁸Carl Davidson, “The New Radicals in the Multiversity: An Analysis and Strategy for the Student Movement,” second printing, SDS Print Shop, May, 1968, series 4B, no. 63, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

⁶⁹It’s unclear here if Farber meant to imply that students were akin to concentration camp inmates or guards, although his emphasis on following orders, which calls to mind both Hannah Arendt’s “banality of evil” and Stanley Milgram’s experiments on conscience and authority, would seem to suggest the latter.

educational system on the other did not go near the reality that most university students were privileged indeed. Yet, his analysis represented the logical end of two strands of New Left thought pertaining to education: first, that education trained people into docile submission, and second, that university students represented an especially oppressed class (a position that from the beginning was privilege-blind).⁷⁰ Many SDS members, however, rejected the argument that they represented a privileged class, calling university attendance a “false privilege” predicated on “An Anti-Human Contract” that forced students into complicity with the military-industrial complex and American imperialism. As Cathy Wilkerson, who was drawn to civil rights and SDS activism while a student at Swarthmore College and who eventually attained notoriety as a Weatherman, put it with others, “not only is the contract anti-human, dehumanizing to us and destructive to others, but the so-called privilege is no privilege at all; the promise of the university is false.”⁷¹

Founded in 1966, the Radical Education Project itself owed a clear intellectual debt to the ferment of the organization’s earlier years, especially in its distrust of systems. The *New Left*, that is, was skeptical of both mainstream American thought and the ideological rigidity of the Old Left. Yet, as elsewhere, in rejecting the latter, they moved closer to the former. In the eyes of many SDS members, the Old Left had failed in part because it naively put its faith in systematic thought (specifically communism), which ultimately and inevitably devalued each individual’s humanity. The New Left would avoid falling into this trap by making individual thoughts, feelings, and experiences the

⁷⁰Jerry Farber, “The Student as N—er: How to Be Slaves,” Los Angeles Free Press, March 3, 1967, series 4B, no. 87, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

⁷¹Cathy Wilkerson, Mike Spiegel, and Les Coleman, “The False Privilege,” Students for a Democratic Society Papers. The piece was originally published in *New Left Notes* on October 7, 1968.

only bedrock of truth. In this way, their vision came uncomfortably close to that of the 1950s Cold Warriors, who similarly contrasted a kind of rugged individualism with the machine-like conformity perceived in communist states. REP also hewed to narrow understandings of what, exactly, constituted the political and the ideological, despite attempts to advance more capacious definitions of these terms. Unlike the free university initiatives, REP sought (at least partially) to distance itself from the romantic strain prominent in 1960s radicalism. The authors of REP's founding proposal recognized that radicalism, "the freedom struggles of Negroes in particular," was currently centered around the "basically moral proposition that people should have the opportunity to participate in shaping the decisions and the conditions of economic, political and cultural existence [*sic*] which affect their lives and destinies." Yet, by 1966, they found this orientation inadequate; while crediting it with much of the new social movements' "vitality and idealism," they also found it to be a "relatively un-ideological moral position," and morals without politics were not enough. The problematic assumption that the civil rights movement lacked politics will be discussed in the next chapter. A functioning left, the authors argued, needed "analysis...a social program and prescription which translates radical vision into concrete realities."⁷²

Yet, the authors of this document were quick to distinguish between what they saw as false ideologies imposed from above and true ideologies emanating from the individual; radical social movements should only, in their view, seek the latter. In their view, false ideologies included both "European radicalism" (in other words, Marxism) and "the myths of the 'American way of life.'" The goal of REP, and of radical social

⁷²Draft for Discussion and Comment, March 20, 1966, series 3, no. 1, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

movements more broadly, was breaking down the “false consciousness” derived from faith in this official American ideology. “By facts, by emotionally powerful experiences and by argument,” radicals should aim to reveal the discrepancies between people’s beliefs in their own autonomy and the actual reality of how power was dispersed. In effect, radical education was to be a de-brainwashing in which people’s false views and learned behaviors were stripped away so that their true selves could emerge. In the end, then, REP returned to the romantic humanism of which it was originally skeptical. Ultimately, they argued, “man is the end and man is the measure. The rock bottom foundation of radical ideology is a view of man—human nature and human possibility.” Stripping away the layers of false consciousness imposed by the American power structure, the authors of this document hoped, would make manifest their dreams of a “utopian ideal of a society where personal creativity is valued and each man is encouraged to develop and express the best that is within him.” Once more, then, SDS members managed to acknowledge *both* the deleterious effects of oppressive social forces *and* reaffirm their belief in the true individual who lay buried underneath.⁷³

Conclusion

In their analyses of the two main institutions governing people’s occupational lives—paid labor and the educational system—SDS members identified the same problems and suggested the same solutions. Both work and education turned authentic individuals into dehumanized cogs in a machine that cared only for profit. For them, the solution was to re-establish the primacy of the individual, finding a way to

⁷³Ibid.

make him (and it *was* him) free, both materially and spiritually, from these repressive forces. In this way, New Leftists drew on two different, but related, 1950s critiques: the Cold War discourse that pitted authentic American individuality against machine-like Soviet conformity and the fear of turning into the identity-less “man in the gray flannel suit.” While the Beat writers with whom SDS members shared so much drew more obviously on the latter, their criticisms of systems and ideologies also connected them to the former. In the process of developing these theories, SDS members developed a gender-specific vision of liberated labor as well as an individualistic humanism in which they themselves were to be the arbiters of what was true and what was false, what emanated from the individual and what was imposed by society. In turn, this made it easy for the white, male members who dominated SDS to dismiss as inauthentic any thoughts, feelings, or experiences that did not comport with their understanding of truth. That is, while certainly the humanism of SDS bore much in common with nineteenth-century Transcendentalism, there was no belief analogous to Ralph Waldo Emerson’s concept of the Oversoul, which posited fundamental similarities and connections among all human beings. Nor, however, did SDS members worry that one person’s authentically expressed individual truth would be fundamentally incompatible with anyone else’s, so confident were they that beliefs and desires that conflicted with their own must reflect vestiges of false consciousness. The next three chapters will explore in greater detail what this meant in terms of gender and race.

Chapter Six: “Democracy Without Publics”: Authenticity, Participatory Democracy, and International Political Engagement

“At Clear Lake Carl Oglesby said that we could find truth in our experiences rather than in the newspapers...” —Press Release, *CAW!*, undated [1968]¹

Along with its opposition to the Vietnam War, Students for a Democratic Society is best-known for its theory of participatory democracy, a polity in which individuals had a direct say in determining the conditions under which they lived. While implementing participatory democracy would require large-scale structural changes, SDS members also believed that the initial transformation would need to be personal; only when people awoke from the perceived apathy of the previous decade and developed a politicized individual consciousness would change be possible. Ironically, though, even as on one level the theory of participatory democracy invited many SDSers to define the 1960s in opposition to the 1950s, on another level it *required* the young organization to come to terms with the problems of mass society, the lynchpin of 1950s anti-Stalinist thought. Like the Cold Warriors who were in many ways their intellectual predecessors, SDS members argued that true democracy was impossible in a mass society. Democracy was only possible, they believed, if masses were turned into *publics* and automatons were turned into individuals. The movement for free (in the abstract, not material sense of the word) education discussed in the previous chapter was important not just as a means

¹ Press Release, *CAW!*, undated [1968], series 4D, no. 9, Students for a Democratic Society Papers (Glen Rock, N.J.: Microfilming Corp. of America, 1977), microfilm [hereafter “Students for a Democratic Society Papers”].

toward individual fulfillment, but because the training offered by the “slave” university made meaningful citizenship in a true democracy impossible.

What to do about “the masses” was thus one of the main problems against which SDS members bumped in their attempts to lay out a vision of participatory democracy. As defined by sociologist C. Wright Mills, an important source of New Left philosophy, masses existed in direct opposition to publics, which were “the seat of all legitimate power.”² As members of a public, citizens participated in the “free ebb and flow of discussion” from which policy properly emanated.³ People developed opinions free from authoritarian coercion and expressed these opinions without fear of reprisal, and the majority opinion, arrived at through spirited debate, became policy. Each person’s voice was heard, recognized, and considered, and people played active roles in the political life of their community. In a mass, by contrast, people had few opportunities to exert their opinions on the polity. This inefficacy was due both to the unresponsiveness of the community’s governing structures and, even more ominously, the degree to which people’s opinions had been imposed on them from above by such institutions as the mass media. In a mass society, people had no thoughts, feelings, or beliefs that emanated from their individual selves. According to Mills, the only logical end of a mass society was “totalitarianism, as in Nazi Germany or in Communist Russia.”⁴ “Mass” and “public” were deployed much the same way in SDS discourse.

The importance of authentic, individual thoughts, feelings, and beliefs also factored into the young organization’s second main problem, which concerned whether

² C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (1956; repr., New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 298.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, 304.

theirs should be a politics based on feelings or program. That is, should they stake out political ground derived from what members perceived was right and wrong based on the reality of their feelings and experiences? Or should they hew to an ideology that dictated what the solutions should be? Here, the anti-ideological, anti-systematic worldview promulgated by so many SDS members reached its full fruition. In the early years of the organization, most SDS members privileged feelings over program, further developing an individualistic humanism in which a person's authentic thoughts, feelings, and desires were the only form of useful knowledge, the only bedrock of truth. This orientation was, moreover, deeply entwined with the problem of "the masses," for SDS members placed upon themselves the responsibility both for distinguishing between those false thoughts, feelings, and desires imposed on "the masses" from above and the true ideas and beliefs emanating from the authentic individual *and* for extirpating inauthentic feelings and behaviors wherever they might lie.

This insistent humanism also functioned for SDS members to distinguish themselves from members of the Old Left, whom they saw as having naively placed their faith in communism, the ideological system most threatening to the younger movement (because they had the most to lose from being associated with it). Thus, while SDS's emphasis on feelings certainly came from a place deep within its young members, it also functioned to make the organization's ideals more palatable both to U.S. society at large and their parent organization, the socialist, virulently anti-Soviet League for Industrial Democracy. It is not surprising, for example, that later, LID-influenced drafts of the Port Huron Statement emphasized even more forcefully a humanistic politics based on feelings and decried even more adamantly a politics derived from ideological systems.

Neither the tension participatory democracy implied between the need for personal change and the need for structural change nor this tension's relationship to communism and anti-communism was wholly unselfconscious, however.

Of course, even in the organization's early years, this emphasis on feelings was not universally accepted. Dissenting voices laid the groundwork for the organization's shift to regimented militancy in the late 1960s, arguing that a politics completely dependent on humanism could never effect meaningful social or political change. Often, the dichotomy between feelings and program was presented as an "us vs. them" issue, distinguishing between those who were truly devoted to political activism and those who participated because it was the latest trend. Although recognizing that they needed the latter group in order for their movement to have a chance to survive, many SDS members were dismissive of the young people whom they saw entering politics based on emotions alone, lacking any true agenda or program. While he praised the sea change that had taken place since the "bleak fifties" in terms of popular support of social movements, for example, Robert Walters, an early SDS member from Pennsylvania, also believed that many young people were attracted to activism "out of a desire to 'do something,'" which "more than likely means that they wanted to use social and political action as a psychological rescue or emotional outlet." Their activism, moreover, was "moral rather than ideological and negative rather than positive"; that is, they were opposed to certain things (racial discrimination, HUAC, and nuclear weaponry, for example) because of how they *felt* about them, yet they lacked "the intellectual training or discipline" required to formulate an overarching ideology or advance a broader program for action.⁵ Yet,

⁵Robert Walters, "Where Do We Go from Here?," December 16, 1961, series 1, no. 3, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

these dissenting voices never claimed that SDS's vision of humanism, in which it was possible to distinguish between true and false, authentic and socially imposed, individual and mass thought, was incorrect—only that relying exclusively on it was not politically effective.

Even those most responsible for promulgating SDS's humanistic bent, including Tom Hayden, recognized that a politics based on feelings alone—without the support of concrete goals and strategies—would merely produce rumination, not a movement. He first grappled with these questions in early drafts of what would become the Port Huron Statement. Just what sort of organization was SDS to be? Should its politics be based on feelings—visceral distinctions between right and wrong—or program—concrete models aimed at implementing a specific social, economic, and political structure? And how to translate the beliefs and goals of a small, young organization into a fundamental overhaul of the American polity? These questions were not unrelated; their answers were one and the same. For Hayden and others, a politics based on feelings rather than program was the only way forward. Moreover, combating the effects of other kinds of programming—the kinds that imposed conformity and apathy on the American public—was the only way to bring about a true participatory democracy.

One of the problems Hayden identified early on was the atomization of society—the isolation of individuals both from the institutions that governed their lives and from one another. “We seem too far sunk within our social niche to obtain that breadth of view which might integrate our scattered thoughts and hunches,” he wrote, “We are too tightly confined to specialized roles to understand and take up the citizen's role which might integrate us as participants in society's total progression.” The individual was so

far removed from the rest of humanity as to not even truly be a spectator—rather, one was a stranger, “living in the caverns of man, sometimes overhearing, but never fully understanding, what the other fellow is doing. The closer and more crowded the world becomes, the more remote from its momentous activities we seem.”⁶

Searching for a way to rectify these social ills, young people should have been able to turn to their political forebears—the labor movement, American socialism, and radical academia—for guidance. Yet, to Hayden, the history of the American left seemed meaningless and irrelevant. Their slogans, while copious, seemed to lack either substance or engagement with social reality. Hayden accused his predecessors on the left of doing nothing more than repeatedly “pouring old wine into new bottles,” attempting to impose past solutions on a present that they did not fit. To Hayden, the Old Left slogans “Capitalism Cannot Reform Itself, United Against Fascism, General Strike, [and] All Out on May Day” were “petty, irrelevant, and worst of all, incomplete.” His organization would need to avoid falling into this trap.⁷

To avoid repeating the shortcomings of past leftist movements, however, SDS needed to engage in a delicate balancing act between vision and morality on the one hand and program and theory on the other. Drawing on British novelist and philosopher Iris Murdoch, Hayden noted that “our liberal and socialist ancestors were plagued by vision without program while our generation is plagued by program without vision.” SDS confronted a society in which no unifying morality underlay most people’s support for concrete policies, even progressive policies such as socialized healthcare. In the “barren

⁶Tom Hayden, “Manifesto Notes: A Beginning Draft,” Convention Document #1, March 19, 1962, series 1, no. 6, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

⁷Ibid.

period” that the young people of the 1960s had inherited, individual moral visions were seen as less important than concrete, visible markers of success, usually attained by turning off one’s mind and following the rules set out by society. “Values,” Hayden wrote,

are controlled more extremely than children: not only are they not heard, they are not seen. In some cases they are no longer even experienced, but the young have not been around long enough for the moral appetite to be rendered arid, and so the young are disaffected. The questions we think existentially important receive deferential [*sic*] treatment, if any treatment at all, by the men whose minds and imaginations are respected by society. The asking of serious questions is discouraged, the answering is never attempted. The grade, the seniority, the mental prostitution is the thing. Soon we stop raising the questions, and find it easier to “get by.” This is called growing up absurd.⁸

That is, values were lost as part of the conditioning process by which people learned to listen not to their inner voices, but to the voices of authority figures and rule makers. The implication was that, because they were still young, it was perhaps not too late for SDS members to undo this training and reclaim the inner voices that would lead them to a moral vision. It was still possible, in other words, to fight back against the “tyranny of categories,” to identify their own morality rather than “filching our values.” The individual could still “become a creator and self-maker rather than a pitiless and buffeted thing unable to reach the forces that control.”⁹

Yet, this moral vision was not enough. Heeding both Iris Murdoch’s call to the left to build “a house of theory” that would make its morality easily understood by the broader public and C. Wright Mills’ warning that silent intellectuals “join the forces that train men not to be able to think and imagine and feel in morally and politically adequate ways,” Hayden insisted that individual morality translate into public action. Turning the

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

house of theory from a blueprint into a concrete structure that was not another prison, however, proved complex.¹⁰

Hayden devoted an entire section of his draft manifesto to the “problems of democracy.” SDS famously relied on the concept of “participatory democracy” to distinguish its vision of personal autonomy from the limited manner in which most Americans were able to participate in the political decision-making process. Yet, historians have rarely appreciated the myriad levels on which Hayden and others intended this term to function.¹¹ It was not just about empowering communities to control the material conditions of their own lives and labor, although it certainly included these goals. It was also, however, about enabling individuals to free their true identities from “the social, physical, and historical forces which have shaped” them. Not only was “the liberation of this individual potential” moral, but it was also *necessary* if participatory democracy were to become a reality. “For the democratic man,” Hayden argued, “freedom must be a condition of the inner self.” That is, participatory democracy required not only a fundamental transformation of formal political structures, but also

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹ Doug Rossinow’s excellent study of authenticity in the New Left is an important, albeit partial, exception to this pattern. That is, he notes that the emphasis placed in the Port Huron Statement on “finding a meaning in life that is personally authentic” was indicative of “the new left’s ultimate aim...to alter social arrangements so as to allow as many people as possible to pursue that goal,” he does not connect these aims to a full parsing of the theory of participatory democracy, nor, given his focus on existentialism as the main impetus behind the New Left’s obsession with authenticity, does he make the connection to anxiety over “the masses.” Similarly, James Miller has noted that “in the writing of Tom Hayden alone, there is a constant tension between civic republicanism on the one hand and existentialism on the other: when he follows Mills and his own teacher Arnold Kauffman, he depicts a world of orderly face-to-face discussions among responsible citizens; when he follows Camus and his own enthusiasm for the daring politics of direct action, he depicts a world of clashing wills and romantic heroes, mastering fate through the hard assertion of personality...the tension in Hayden’s thinking suggests that the notion of participatory democracy involves not one, but two distinct political visions: the first is of a face-to-face community of friends sharing interests in common; the second is of an experimental collective, embarked on a high-risk effort to test the limits of democracy in modern life.” See Doug Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 6; James Miller, “*Democracy Is in the Streets*”: *From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 145-6.

personal freedom from the social forces that forced individuals to hide their true selves. Herein lay the problem.¹²

Unfortunately, participatory democracy was most needed in the kind of society that made it most impossible: a “large, fragmented” one. Ironically, it was precisely in people’s isolation from one another that they stopped being citizens and started being a mass, that most frightening of entities to the postwar mind. As Hayden put it, “while men are forced into greater and more complicated interdependence, they also are estranged from each other radically, in the absence of unifying values. Their tastes are shaped by institutions geared toward the lowest common human denominator.” In the absence of authentic community, in other words, people’s thoughts and feelings were determined not by individual free will but by top-down institutions. While Hayden hoped to avoid the elitism of liberals and conservatives alike, who argued that, because “the masses” were uneducated, they would be susceptible to dictators, he could find no way to reconcile the reality of mass society with the vision of participatory democracy. The only way to make people ready for participatory democracy, then, was to begin to free them from the training that had turned them into a “mass” to begin with.

Before receiving feedback on the manifesto from the SDS community, Hayden circulated one more addendum, which picked up once again on the discussion of vision and program. The new organization could not afford to sacrifice either: “A moral aspiration for social equality,” he wrote, “unaccompanied by a political and economic view of society, is at best wistful (I think I mimic [Michael] Harrington) and, at worst, politically irresponsible.” Vision without program, in other words, could only lead to an

¹²Tom Hayden, “Manifesto Notes: Problems of Democracy,” Convention Document #2, March 19, 1962, series 1, no. 2, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

inexcusable isolation, its adherents confident in their own superiority but never taking action to make the world a better place. By contrast, “an economic and political analysis, without an active, open moral pulse, dwindles to uninspiring myopia.” Focusing only on concrete change made it impossible to see the bigger picture. The young organization, then, needed both, but Hayden made it clear that the former was to take precedence over the latter. “Where honesty and short-range effectiveness are in conflict,” he argued, “we should be reluctant to forsake honesty.” Too isolated from the centers of power to be effective on a regular basis in any event, honesty and moral convictions would set the group apart from the compromised pragmatism of what C. Wright Mills called “crackpot realism.”¹³

Many of these issues, particularly those discussed in “Problems of Democracy,” were reduced to a quiet background murmur in the draft circulated at the June 1962 conference, yet it is easy to see how they continued to influence Hayden’s thinking. In the face of tremendous national and international problems, he wrote, Americans were apathetic and “deadened,” the ease with which they accepted the status quo seemingly “hypnotic.” They felt incapable of effecting the change they so desired—as in fact they were. Isolated from both one another and the decision-making process, the American political system had become a “democracy without publics.”¹⁴

As in earlier, partial drafts, “values” received a great deal of attention as the proposed solution to this apathy and isolation. Repeating his earlier distinction between vision without program and program without vision, Hayden argued that large-scale

¹³Tom Hayden, “RE: Manifesto,” spring 1962, series 1, no. 6, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

¹⁴Tom Hayden, Port Huron Statement Draft, 1962, <http://www.sds-1960s.org/PortHuronStatement-draft.htm> [accessed July 1, 2011].

“ideals and utopians” had been replaced by the small-scale “art of the possible,” by which politicians pursued material goals without a broader sense of why those goals were important or what they were working toward. The viability of vision had been eroded in American life, he argued, by factors including Congressional stalemate, the unfortunate influence of Stalinism on the American left, and the horrors of the Holocaust and atomic bombs. Shaken to the core by these unthinkable developments, Hayden argued, Americans stumbled blindly through life without any sense of where they were going or why. The country badly needed an injection of moral idealism.¹⁵

Yet, Hayden still made a tepid case for theory, even as he felt the need to apologize for and qualify this assertion. “In suggesting social goals and theories,” he acknowledged, “we are aware of entering a realm of disrepute.” He insisted that SDS had learned from history and in no way meant to propose a systematic or rigid way of understanding the world. “Perhaps matured by the past,” he wrote, “we have no sure formulas, no closed theories.” He remained convinced, however, “that a first task of any new social movement is to convince people that the search for orienting theories and the creation of human values are both possible and worth while.” Only by integrating their “confused sentiments and discrete notions,” their disparate thoughts and feelings into a more cohesive understanding of how the world worked could “men...becom[e]...creators and self-makers, rather than pitiful, buffeted things unable to understand the forces that control.”¹⁶

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

Thus, it is important to note that Hayden framed his understanding of vision and theory in a way palatable to the anti-Stalinism of SDS's parent organization, the League for Industrial Democracy, although LID was not so easily placated. This is not to say, however, that Hayden presented the issues in such a way merely for LID's benefit. Rather, the importance of humanism over theory, morality over program was a key element of SDS thought, revealing the degree to which its members had internalized the ideological exigencies of their historical milieu.

The humanism espoused in the draft manifesto rested, moreover, on a delicate balance between an awareness of the dysfunctional ways in which people were socialized and a celebration of the human agent's ability to overcome this socialization. In this view, human beings were "infinitely precious and infinitely perfectible." Hayden saw this in direct contrast to "perhaps the dominant conceptions of man in the twentieth century: that he is a thing to be manipulated, and that he is inherently incapable of directing his own affairs." Insisting that humans were utterly at the mercy of social and historical forces beyond their control was a form of "depersonalization" that "reduces human beings to the status of things." By contrast, Hayden saw humanity as endowed with "infinite potential for self-cultivation, self-direction, self-understanding, and creativity." Ultimately, the good society would rest on "human independence" and "a concern...with finding a meaning in life that is personally authentic." This did not mean separating oneself from other human beings. Rather, the good society would come about when people were able to peel away the socially-imposed mask of conventional behaviors to interact with one another in honest, non-coerced ways. Concretely, then, SDS's goals would need to center on challenging those institutions that made such a

“personally authentic” life impossible, including the nation’s political, economic, and educational structures.¹⁷

Here, however, was an issue—distinguishing between the false values imposed by society and the true values emanating from the individual—that required careful consideration. That is, while SDS members believed beyond a shadow of a doubt that one’s thoughts, values, and beliefs were determined by environment, they *also* believed that true needs and desires lay buried beneath this socialization. Beyond Tom Hayden’s Port Huron Statement, both Todd Gitlin, who would become SDS president in 1963, and Donald McKelvey, SDS Assistant National Secretary from 1962 to 1964, attempted to make just such a distinction. “One of the diabolical successes of this organized society,” Gitlin wrote, “is that it perverts people’s notions about themselves into fantasies that perpetuate an unjust system. . . . Cultural and commercial pressures generate artificial ‘needs’ that, in the minds of the victims, displace more human needs.” Following from this, he argued, one could reach one of two extreme conclusions: either none of the needs and desires expressed by humans was true and valid, or all of them were. The problem with the first interpretation was that it reduced human beings to “blank slates upon which the environment writes its will,” in the process asserting that “there are no such things as basic ‘human needs’”; the problem with the second interpretation was that it could easily slide into solipsistic or hedonistic moral relativism. That is, if *all* thoughts and feelings were considered valid, people could easily justify, for example, their racist beliefs. Unsurprisingly, Gitlin rejected both of these approaches. Instead, he argued in Marcusean fashion that “we must decide for ourselves which expressed needs are genuine or ‘just,’

¹⁷Ibid.

and which are artificial or wrong.” They could then proceed to re-educating the public to embrace more appropriate thoughts, beliefs, needs, and desires.¹⁸

Gitlin did note that “no hard-and-fast rule can be laid down for dealing with expressed needs we consider wrong,”¹⁹ a disclaimer taken up with greater urgency by Donald McKelvey. In 1960, as a senior at Haverford College outside of Philadelphia, McKelvey first sketched out his plan for “a practicable utopia”: a society based on love among human beings and on removing controls that limited the expression of individual free will. However, McKelvey cautioned readers not to take these recommendations as definitive. As a young person in whom the tenets of modern philosophy, specifically the impossibility of attaining absolute truth, had long been inculcated, McKelvey knew that he could “never know I know what is Right or Good.” Yet, human beings had a responsibility to attempt to discover and live by the proper values. McKelvey captured the difficulty of these two seemingly incompatible perspectives when he wrote, full of ambivalence, that “it is our task to set up values (even while knowing that they may not be eternal truths) which we consider central to the solution of the problem of ‘la condition humaine.’ And it is *vital*, in doing so, that we realize that these are not eternal truths, but are subject to human inadequacies.” Four years later, publishing his piece for distribution among SDS members, McKelvey qualified his vision even further. “Systems of values and beliefs,” he wrote in a new author’s preface, “must be open to constant re-examination”; what seemed good and true in 1960 might not be so in 1964. McKelvey acknowledged an intellectual debt to thinkers including Erich Fromm, Aldous Huxley,

¹⁸Todd Gitlin, *The Battlefields and the War*, undated, series 2B, no. 2, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

¹⁹*Ibid.*

and B.F. Skinner. In the minds of SDS members like McKelvey, Fromm's and Huxley's fears of the suppression of the individual and the unintended consequences of relying too heavily on systematic thought easily co-existed with Skinner's behaviorism, which held that people's behavior could be manipulated by the wise to produce greater happiness.²⁰

Only the former perspective factored into what members saw as the true meaning of participatory democracy, however: not just people's ability to participate in making decisions about the material conditions of their lives, but a social setting in which people were able to break free from the training that left them feeling powerless, craving false solutions to their isolation and alienation. It was the ability of humans to reclaim agency in the face of institutions that made them into objects—to become doers rather than done-tos. It meant stripping away the learned façade of docility, complacency, and inoffensiveness. True social change would take place only when apathetic robots were replaced with authentic human beings ready to be honest about both themselves and the world. Participatory democracy certainly included the process by which community members “[met] their collectively-determined needs,” but this was by no means its extent. Participatory democracy was also necessarily a political structure in which “men find meaning in their personal and collective life.”²¹ As an ideal, however, participatory democracy also eluded concrete definition, for it could only arise in response to the material conditions of people's lives, not from intellectual abstraction. Here again was the hallmark of SDS's suspicion of systematic thought.

²⁰Donald McKelvey, “A Practicable Utopia,” 1964, series 4B, no. 231, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

²¹Ibid.

Other members of the fledgling organization were quick to respond to Hayden's discussion of feelings and program, with strong support for each side. In an exchange with the New Left Club at Chapel Hill, for example, then-SDS president Al Haber revealed a strong preference for the former, identifying feelings and program with, respectively, liberals and leftists (interestingly, Haber's father had been a member of the League for Industrial Democracy, SDS's parent organization). As he put it,

The leftist tends more to focus on structural change and he has some kind of theoretical, explanatory system that connects values with analysis and analysis with program. The liberal focuses on values: what I believe, what does the good society look like—and generally not as a total picture, but first in one facet, then in another and then somewhere else without too much sense of interconnectedness. The disinterest in theory, or in explanation, is in part the base for what I think is a lesser concern with facts and the way facts are put together. Thus empirical and historical precision seem to be further differentiating factors, being by and large more a concern of the leftist than the liberal.²²

Based on these criteria alone, Haber argued, SDS was more of a liberal than a left organization, and rightly so in his estimation. That is, he believed that the main organizing thrust of the group would be around “democratic values,” not “a political or economic formulation.” These conclusions were based both on demographics, with more young people drawn to humanism than dogma, and the fear that an organization dominated by the left would tend toward “abstraction,” “elitism,” and “alienation.” Yet, Haber hoped that the left would have a role in the organization, for its constituents brought qualities that liberals lacked. While the left had theories and facts, the liberal “by and large operates on instincts and is ignorant.” While the left hewed to a particular, clearly-defined political dogma, the liberal “has more of a visceral sense of politics.” Finally, while the left engaged in activism in order to bring about a specific set of

²²Al Haber to the New Left Club at Chapel Hill, in “Aims and Purposes of SDS: Some Comments,” 1962, series 1, no. 6, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

concrete changes, the liberal “is more responsive to its [activism’s] human, immediate or soul cleansing functions.”²³

Not all assembled embraced Haber’s privileging of humanism over ideology. Nick Bateson, chair of the Chapel Hill group and a graduate student in the English department, thought that Haber was correct in the general distinctions he drew between liberals and leftists, but he disagreed with Haber’s preference for liberalism. Quoting Michael Harrington, he pointed out that “a political humanism without an economic analysis, a political humanism without a conception of actual social forces struggling to realize values, is a contradiction at best and a nostalgic piety at worst.”²⁴ Haber, Bateson argued, aligned himself with the wrong side of Harrington’s argument. Moreover, Bateson found concepts such as “democratic values” abstract to the point of meaninglessness. In his view “democracy” was a term so vague as to be claimed not only by the left, but also by mainstream liberals such as John F. Kennedy and Nelson Rockefeller and even conservatives such as Barry Goldwater.²⁵

In his comments on the draft of the Port Huron Statement, Howard Richards, SLID member, attorney, and University of California-Santa Barbara philosophy graduate student, defended and expanded on Haber’s humanistic understanding of democracy. It was, he argued, nothing more and nothing less than the “rule of man,” which “implies and requires that all aspects of the environment be treated as subordinate to man.”

Democracy’s power lay precisely in its anti-systematic resistance to theorizing, for it

²³Ibid.

²⁴Quoted in Nick Bateson to Al Haber, in “Aims and Purposes of SDS: Some Comments,” 1962, series 1, no. 6, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

²⁵Ibid.

allowed no model—be it free enterprise or Marxism—to take precedence over human beings’ actual needs. While these needs certainly included material rights to adequate food, education, housing, and medical care, for example, they also extended to the more abstract or spiritual realm. Democracy, that is, presupposed a society in which an individual would “be able to realize himself as human...to live a life according to one’s own nature.” Brief though it was, Richards’ explication of the nature of democracy contained within it many of the key aspects of SDS thought. Reluctant by way of both genealogy and inclination to embrace economic determinism, members instead advanced an anti-theoretical theory aimed at cultivating individuals’ potential to be the fully-realized human beings they were intended to be. This theory of democracy also implied both that social forces shaped and circumscribed human potential and that a true self existed buried underneath these social forces.²⁶

Roger Leed, a National Student Association staff member, pushed SDS further toward a perspective based on humanism and away from one based on economic determinism. His comments on an early draft of the Port Huron Statement largely concerned themselves with Tom Hayden’s emphasis on morality as a key guiding force for the organization. Leed believed that it was impossible to develop “an integrated and symmetrical [*sic*] moral position”; that is, it was useless to strive for a clearly-defined and uniformly-applied system of morality that would provide ready-made answers to ambiguous situations. Rather, he felt that uncompromising honesty—truthful reactions to the realities one faced—was the only true morality. In other words, any truthful philosophy of morality would need to spring from careful consideration of actual

²⁶Howard Richards, Comments on Manifesto Drafts, in “Aims and Purposes of SDS: Some Comments,” 1962, series 1, no. 6, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

circumstances. The belief that a fully-formed morality could be *imposed* upon reality was a mere chimera.²⁷ In this way, SDS's anti-systematic thought included some commonalities with situation ethics, in which ethical choices could only be made within a specific context.

To the author of "Politics, the Individual, and S.D.S.," as to Al Haber, neither honesty nor program alone was enough. In contrast to those within the organization who believed that alienation from power was a necessary for cultivating a pure political vision, this author found only resignation in the isolation of the visionary. Barricading themselves within colleges and universities or idealistic yet disengaged political movements (for example, the American Socialist movement and the peace movement), these individuals held onto their beliefs and theories without ever testing them against social reality. Yet, the opposite tendency was equally problematic; the person who cared only for immediate material goals supported by no larger vision "drifts to programmatic myopia, to a fear of big ideas, to an expedient scaling down of values to whatever portion can be adopted by the politicians here and now." A "prey of habit," this individual was content to apply ready-made solutions to new and complex social realities.²⁸ The way forward for SDS was to combine the best elements of these tendencies: to remain distant enough from the centers of power to analyze them critically and independently, yet to recognize the importance of working within the power structure when it would help to bring about change. In concrete terms, this meant several things. It meant, for example,

²⁷Roger Leed, Some Thoughts on Message and Positions, in "Aims and Purposes of SDS: Some Comments," 1962, series 1, no. 6, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

²⁸"Politics, the Individual, and S.D.S.," undated, series 1, no. 6, Students for a Democratic Society Papers. Interestingly, James Miller identifies what must have been an earlier or later version of this document as "Politics, the *Intellectual*, and S.D.S." (my emphasis), citing it as yet another draft of the *Port Huron Statement*. Miller, 99.

thoughtful, critical engagement with both the undemocratic ethos of party-line communists and the ideologically-bereft “programmatic liberal” who justified decisions only on the vague basis of “the national interest,” “the only realistic thing to do,” or “Western traditions.” It meant supplementing “visionary statements” with intermediate and “programmatic” goals. For example, supporting a bill that included medical care for the elderly would be an intermediate step toward the vision of socialized medical care for all. It also meant, however, that SDS should strive for internal discussion and debate in order to avoid “habitual ways of looking at life.” In other words, material goals should spring from values (in turn derived from experience, not abstraction), but the validity of both morality and program needed to be constantly tested and re-tested in the laboratory of the organization. Later in the decade, the consciousness-raising groups of the women’s liberation movement attempted to arrive at truth the same way.²⁹

Despite significant interventions from both other SDS members and LID elsewhere in the manifesto, the “values” sections of the Port Huron Statement remained largely unchanged between penultimate and final draft. Small changes, however, reflected both influences. Going from the suggestion that “this is the first generation to know it might be the last in the long experiment at living” to the insistence that “we may be the last generation in the experiment with living” and expanding on the latter’s meaning, for example, made it clear that “living” was intended in two senses. While certainly it meant to imply the threat of nuclear annihilation, the final draft also made it

²⁹Ibid. Interestingly, historian James Gilbert, himself an SDS member, argued in his 1968 book *Writers and Partisans* that an inability to let go of utopian models contributed to the downfall of the leftist *Partisan Review* circle, beginning the book’s final chapter with Irving Howe’s assertion that “ideology reflects a hardening of commitment, the freezing of opinion into system.” His words would no doubt have resonated deeply with the young people of the 1960s. Irving Howe, *Politics and the Novel*, quoted in James Gilbert, *Writers and Partisans: A History of Literary Radicalism in America* (New York: James Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1968), 253.

clear that true “living” lay in direct contrast to the deadened apathy of most Americans. This apathy was not, as other commentators had suggested, a contentment borne of affluence, but rather a “stagnation,” an awareness of the “emptiness of life,” a “glaze above deeply felt anxieties.” Moreover, the “exhaustion not only of Utopias, but of any new departures” made most Americans feel as if there were no alternatives, no ways to combat the circumstances in which they had been reduced essentially to sleepwalking zombies. In helping “man attain...determining influence over his circumstances of life,” SDS hoped to function as a corrective to this situation.³⁰

The section on vision and program received some tweaking, too. Despite its apologies and qualifications, the penultimate draft was more comfortable with theory than the final draft would become. While the earlier draft, for example, suggested “social goals and *theories*,” the later draft called for “social goals and *values*.” While the final draft did retain (only very slightly altered) language insisting that “a first task of any social movement is to convince people that the search for orienting theories and the creation of human values is complex but worthwhile,” it also included new caveats: theory was only valid, the manifesto was quick to point out, if it was based on analysis of the “concrete conditions of social order.” In other words, it must emanate *from*, not dictate *to*, lived experience. According to the logic of the Cold War, *theory* was a frightening term because it conjured up images of a totalizing, systematic understanding of the world, imposing rigid doctrine on the human experience and forcing humans to fit themselves into a structure that left little room for individuality. The Port Huron Statement took great pains to avoid even the suggestion that such totalizing theories were

³⁰Tom Hayden, Port Huron Statement, 1962, <http://coursesa.matrix.msu.edu/~hst306/documents/huron.html> [accessed July 1, 2011].

among their goals. Yet, despite a fair amount of discussion at the convention, language insisting that “a new left must include liberals and socialists, the former for their relevance, the latter for their sense of thoroughgoing reforms in the system” remained unchanged from one draft to the next.³¹

The final draft also tilted the organization’s delicate balance between individualism and collectivism a bit toward the former, although both attempted to stake a middle ground between the rugged individualism of a Howard Roark and the collectivism associated with the Soviet bloc. Imploring readers not to confuse their calls for individual freedom and self-expression with a rejection of or separation from other human beings, both versions of the manifesto condemned the “loneliness, estrangement, [and] isolation” that characterized “the vast distance between man and man today.” Rather, human beings must develop a “love of man” that could “overcome...the idolatrous worship of things by man.” Yet, they were equally quick to point out that such interconnectedness in no way implied that individual will was to be subsumed by the greater good. In fact, it meant quite the opposite. “As the individualism we affirm is not egoism,” the final draft read in language similar to its predecessor, “the selflessness we affirm is not self-elimination. On the contrary, we believe in generosity of a kind that imprints one’s unique individual qualities in the relation to other men, and to all human activity. Further, to dislike isolation is not to favor the abolition of privacy; the latter differs from isolation in that it occurs or is abolished according to individual will.” Significantly, *generosity* replaced the earlier draft’s *sacrifice*. In the community that participatory democracy both implied and required, it was not necessary—indeed, it was

³¹Hayden, Port Huron Statement, emphasis added.

not desirable—for the individual to give up any part of her- or himself. Moreover, while the earlier draft described the kind of political involvement made possible by participatory democracy to be “a necessary, though not sufficient, part of the total experience by which men find meaning in their personal and collective life and by which they establish a society to meet their collectively-determined needs,” the final draft replaced the charged *collective* with the more benign *community*. In this version, politics had “the function of bringing people out of isolation and into community, thus being a necessary, though not sufficient, means of finding meaning in personal life.” In this view, community functioned as an aid only to *personal* growth.³²

As historian Martin Klimke has pointed out, the Port Huron Statement was also significantly influenced by Michael Vester, a member of the German SDS who spent the 1961-2 school year as an exchange student at Bowdoin College.³³ Vester originally came into contact with American student activists the previous year, when he was responsible for the German organization’s international relations. He did not hesitate to cultivate these ties further when he arrived in the U.S.³⁴ Vester praised Hayden’s anti-anti-communism, especially in contrast to the “blind anticommunism” that so many West Germans and Americans unthinkingly adopted. Both blind anticommunism and its antithesis, blind anti-capitalism, replaced individual thought with black-and-white ideologies, and Vester urged his American counterparts not to fall prey to either. As Klimke notes, Vester’s fear of ideology derived from the influence on the German New

³²Ibid.

³³ Martin Klimke, *The Other Alliance: Student Protest in West Germany and the United States in the Global Sixties* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 10.

³⁴ Ibid., 18-19.

Left of Theodor Adorno and other Frankfurt School intellectuals.³⁵ It was also, however, a language that members of the American organization already spoke.

The following year, 1963, the nature of citizenship in a mass society and the virtues of morality versus program were scattered throughout various drafts of “America and the New Era,” the follow-up to the Port Huron Statement. Primarily written by University of Michigan graduate student and Peace Research and Education Project (PREP) activist Dick Flacks, “America and the New Era” also received significant contributions from Paul Booth, a Swarthmore student among the first group of SDS National Executive Committee members, Vice President of the organization in 1962-3, and National Secretary in 1965-6; Al Haber; Tom Hayden; and Bob Ross, another University of Michigan graduate and the organization’s first National Executive Committee vice chairman. Dismissing the concerns that had so vexed Tom Hayden in “Problems of Democracy” the previous year, for example, the new manifesto chided labor and liberals for being “more concerned with the potential nihilism of mass society, represented in McCarthyism, than with the obscured conflicts of a conservative and class-bound society.”³⁶ Other evidence suggests that the organization was moving away from feelings and toward program; as a later draft argued, “political organization is meaningless without political program—definitive and concrete proposals based on serious analyses of existing conditions and capable of directly addressing and coping with the troubles and problems of people. The immediate need is for such social and political

³⁵ Ibid., 22.

³⁶ American Scene Document (Draft), June 7, 1963, series 2A, no. 3, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

analysis and the formulation of such programs.”³⁷ Yet, the final draft returned to the humanism of the Port Huron Statement:

Our hope is human freedom. We care that men everywhere be able to understand, express and determine their lives with one another. We ask to participate in the construction of a society in which men have, at last, the chance to make the decisions which shape their lives. Our quest is for a political and economic order, in which power is used for the widest social benefit and a community in which men can come to know each other and themselves as human beings in the fullest sense.³⁸

As in earlier iterations of participatory democracy, material change was only half of the battle. Individuals also needed to be able to find and express their true, full humanity.

An anonymous “Manifesto for Individuals,” written around 1967 as SDS was becoming more militant, argued that the problems of the age—particularly the ever-present threat of nuclear annihilation—could be met only by individuals, not by groups (including nation-states). The problem with groups, the manifesto author wrote, was that they replaced critical inquiry with unthinking loyalty. One outcome of unthinking group loyalty was the treacherous bipolarity of the Cold War world, with American and Soviet citizens alike brainwashed into unquestioning support of the goals of their respective nations.³⁹

In order to further illustrate the point, the author used the example of a person drawn to the Communist Party in a nation such as the United States, where membership was stigmatized. In exchange for complete acceptance of the party line, the author argued, the new member received a great deal of emotional compensation, primarily the satisfaction of belonging. It provided automatic enemies, ideologies, and actions, in

³⁷“A New Agenda for America,” 1963, series 2A, no. 3, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

³⁸“America and the New Era,” 1963, series 2A, no. 3, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

³⁹Manifesto for Individuals, 1967?, series 3, no. 1, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

effect offering the neophyte a ready-made identity to slip on over her or his old, unsatisfying self. So taken was the convert with this new identity that she or he “[did not] even realize that your normal inclination to question and analyze has itself become quietly ‘blanked over’ at this point.” For those who *did* realize the extent to which their capabilities for critical thought had been compromised, there were other problems, for the emotional satisfaction one derived from belonging could only continue apace with one’s intellectual acquiescence: questioning dogma would lead to isolation.⁴⁰

Group loyalty, moreover, inevitably fostered a mentality in which those who did not belong to the group were seen as enemies, and herein lay the particular historical urgency. As long as nations lacked the means to destroy one another, group loyalty, while not ideal, was also not catastrophic. According to the author, the development of nuclear technology and its concomitant mutually assured destructive capabilities effectively ended the possibility of coexistence. In this context, unthinking group loyalty became not only troubling, but potentially disastrous. Thus, the author argued that one of SDS’s primary goals should be undoing the training by which group loyalty replaced critical thinking. They needed to re-teach those whose identities had come to be solely defined by group membership how to be individual human beings once more. This was not merely an intellectual exercise; rather, the author believed that reclaiming individuality was the only way to avoid an apocalyptic showdown between the United States and the Soviet Union.

The choice of the Communist Party as an example of unthinking loyalty was no accident, for the author did believe that the CP was particularly beholden to dogma, but

⁴⁰Ibid.

the manifesto's view of communism as an ideology (as opposed to the Communist Party as an organization) was significantly more complex. The problem with the CP, as with any large group, was that its leaders refused to allow for natural change and growth. The way forward, then, was not to condemn those who belonged to groups other than one's own, but rather to try to understand why and how people developed such unswerving group loyalty. As the author put it,

In this understanding of why people gather into these separate and opposed groups we have a firm foundation for a world of just being people together. But it will not just come by itself. It will have to be led; and it will not be led by those who lead us at present, committed as they are to giving their first loyalty to the separate pieces of our broken world. It will have to be led by individuals with *an insistent vision of wholeness in their own selves*...the answer lies not in shooting people in any circumstances but in *advancing the technique of being an individual*. There is no future for the big groups as such. The future lies with individuals who are prepared to be full individuals.⁴¹

This problem of unthinking group loyalty was not, however, confined to the Communist Party; rather, the author went on to argue, it was equally problematic to base one's identity on belonging to a certain "creed, class, country, colour or race."⁴² In this startling view, the author advanced the idea that it was dangerous for members of marginalized groups to experience feelings of racial solidarity with their fellows. At least in this instance, the extent to which SDS members anticipated one aspect of identity politics—the importance of personal truth, emotion, and experience—precluded support for the group identity that made it an effective political tool. As chapter eight will show, a greater recognition of collective consciousness was one of the key ways in which the women's liberation movement refigured the SDS concept of authenticity.

⁴¹Ibid., emphasis added.

⁴² Ibid.

Luckily, in the author's view, there already were people who had broken free from this need for group belonging and reclaimed their individuality: the young, white men of SDS. As human beings ready to "be our own selves," people "who already can live without the emotional support of an exclusive sense of belong to nation-groups and faith-groups," it was incumbent upon them to lead this new movement. They would need "to provide a definite service of temporary support for those not yet able to" resist the siren song of group identity and "accept...one's own self." As the manifesto closed, it became clear that individuality was important to the author not only as a means of avoiding material destruction; it was also a prerequisite for the establishment of participatory democracy. Asserting that "democracy as a system of living together in communities will only work when a sufficient number of people are prepared to be full individuals in their own right," the piece argued that individuality functioned as an effective bulwark against totalitarianism, which gained a more secure foothold each time people buried their true selves in order to conform to majority opinion. Ultimately, then, the author reiterated the SDS belief that participatory democracy included not only the ability to determine the material conditions of one's life, but also the ability to claim one's full humanity—not imposed on one from above but rather emanating from a deeply personal sense of self.⁴³

In an extensive treatise on the subject of democracy, Dick Howard, an SDS member and philosophy graduate student at the University of Texas, Austin, added a gendered twist to the argument presented in the "Manifesto for Individuals." Substituting the terms masses and publics for groups and individuals, Howard argued that true democracy could only thrive if (effeminate) masses were replaced by (masculine)

⁴³Ibid.

publics. Howard was dissatisfied with the Port Huron Statement, which he felt correctly identified the powerlessness people experienced, yet recommended no adequate solutions to this powerlessness. In Howard's view, the manifesto astutely recognized "the powerlessness of each of us against the machine which calls itself society" and rightly condemned politics as "the effete exercise of the middle class housewife seeking refuge from her automated kitchen," yet in terms of concrete action only encouraged engagement with this "great machine." By doing so, Howard further argued, SDS members were participating in and perpetuating the myth that "mass democracy" was a reality rather than an inherent contradiction in terms.⁴⁴

Drawing on C. Wright Mills' distinction between masses and publics, Howard argued that the massification of society—a term he used to denote the disappearance of the individual—was precisely the reason for people's powerlessness *vis-à-vis* the political process. While members of a public could think for themselves, experienced control over their own lives, and had a meaningful voice in the political life of their society, masses did not. While members may be granted symbolic forms of political participation (as in voting for representatives), these actions were meaningless, for members of the mass had all of their beliefs dictated to them from above. In place of the "freedom for the individual" that democracy both implied and required, there existed a system in which "our news, our ideology in general, is fed us through impersonal media which allows us no chance for response, no means for intelligent interrogation." In other words,

⁴⁴Dick Howard, "SDS: Present and Future," undated, series 3, no. 3, Students for a Democratic Society Papers. This piece was written a few years after, but in direct response to, the Port Huron Statement.

acceptable thoughts and feelings were imposed from outside and in a top-down manner rather than emanating from the individual her- or himself.⁴⁵

The fact that (as Howard saw it) most people were content to be part of the mass, to live their lives in ineffectual complacency with little to no freedom of thought, was an additional problem. Accordingly, the first goal of SDS must be to locate those places in which vestiges of a public still existed, most importantly the organization itself. He believed that “we can ourselves be the point of departure... We in SDS have escaped from that fate” of massification. Only by finding others like them could they hope for “more than the mechanical galvanization of the mass”: “a movement... composed of *individuals* who are fully conscious of that which they seek, and why they seek it.”⁴⁶

Unsurprisingly, Howard identified students as the best place to begin looking for publics. The category of students, however, comprised both more and less than those who spent time in a classroom. Many people who attended colleges and universities, Howard argued, should not be considered students because they had never “experienced the quest for knowledge.” By contrast, many who were not involved in formal learning *did* belong to this category: as long as one was “a lover of wisdom and a seeker after self-knowledge,” one was a student. Yet, in his attempt to build a more capacious understanding of what constituted a student, Howard collided with the gendered logic of his larger argument: he was quick to point out that no *true* students were to be found “at community courses geared to the housewife with nothing better to do with her time.”⁴⁷

⁴⁵Ibid. Mills’ discussion of masses and publics predated Jurgen Habermas’ articulation of the public sphere by several years. First published in German in 1962, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* was not translated into English until 1989.

⁴⁶Ibid., emphasis in original.

⁴⁷Ibid.

In this context, Howard's insistence that "*he* [the student] is searching for wisdom and self-knowledge...*he* is a free conscience" was much more than a period-specific linguistic convention. Rather, it revealed a deeply-held belief that only men were capable of attaining such freedom. Only those who fit Howard's definition of a student were capable of true citizenship, of true democracy. Political effectiveness, moreover, depended on differentiating oneself from the mechanized, conformist masses, represented throughout Howard's piece by women. If, as discussed above, the current, massified political system were an "effete exercise" most closely analogous to the "automated kitchen," the solution must be to re-masculinize the enterprise. It is dispiriting, although not terribly surprising, that Howard's mind would have settled upon women's lives as the best example of a society in which individuals had been turned into masses. Rather, it shows SDS's intellectual kinship with the postwar intellectuals and social critics, such as Dwight Macdonald and Leslie Fiedler, who often argued that women, particularly suburban housewives, epitomized the massification of society. In drawing on this logic, Howard's argument implicitly gendered participatory democracy itself male. As both male Beats and proto-feminists such as Betty Friedan saw the reality of women's lives as incompatible with the creation of authentic art, so, too, did male New Leftists see the reality of women's lives as incompatible with participatory democracy.⁴⁸

Participatory democracy clearly comprised much more than a direct say in the polity or control over the material conditions of one's life. It required nothing less than the reclamation of one's authentic humanity, scouring away years and decades of the social training that turned individuals into automatons, citizens into masses. It made

⁴⁸Ibid., emphasis added.

personal feelings and experiences the ultimate bedrock of truth, resisting easy solutions imposed by ideological systems. Thus, even as SDS members attempted to distance themselves from the deadened complacency they saw in the 1950s, they developed a vision of participatory democracy that bore much in common with precisely the mass society-fearing Cold Warriors against whom they defined themselves. Their vision also made those who believed they had resisted massification—SDS members themselves—into a vanguard responsible for de-programming and re-educating the nation’s citizens, which gave them a great deal of authority in delineating true from false beliefs, feelings, and selves. As the next section will show, this belief was particularly problematic when applied to issues of race.

Race / War

Historians including Doug Rossinow and David Barber have paid close attention to Students for a Democratic Society’s simultaneous reverence for and condescension toward the American civil rights movement and romanticization of revolutionaries in places like China, Cuba, Vietnam, and Guatemala. As Tom Hayden argued early on in the organization’s life, one of the things that made it different from other groups was that no one else had “a man in the South, trying to politicize the civil rights movement.”⁴⁹

However, historians have not noted the connections between these tendencies and

⁴⁹Tom Hayden, Comments in reply to Betty Garman, in “Aims and Purposes of SDS: Some Comments,” 1962, series 1, no. 6, Students for a Democratic Society Papers. Garman had questioned whether SDS truly had anything new and unique to add to the student movement. In this section, it is Barber with whom I am most in dialogue. While I share his belief that an inability to see the power relations inherent in white appropriations of otherness was one of the principle failings of SDS, my own research leads me to challenge his conclusion that these encounters with otherness led white radicals to perceive the constructedness of their own identities. On the contrary, it was precisely this idea against which so much of their discourse railed. See Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity*; David Barber, *A Hard Rain Fell: SDS and Why It Failed* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008).

members' fears about massification and dehumanization. While most Americans, SDS members argued, were still cogs in a machine, marginalized peoples both within and outside of the United States had successfully reclaimed their individuality and humanity. People of color thus served a specific ideological purpose for white SDS members. They functioned as evidence that the mechanization of humanity was incomplete, that there were still ways to resist being turned into a machine. This perspective was deeply fraught with patronizing attitudes toward racial others. It is easy to see, for example, how the idea that people of color were freer, more authentic, and better able to break free from the machine of society drew on and perpetuated the belief that other races were more primitive and animalistic. To SDS members, then, breaking free from the machine involved drawing on precisely the racial hierarchies maintained by the mainstream society they so adamantly condemned.

At the same time, SDS members often pasted their own conflicted thoughts about feelings and program onto the worldwide movement for racial equality, especially the American civil rights movement. Their appraisal of the movement was just as likely to deem it too narrowly political as too blindly passionate. The ambivalence SDS members felt concerning the orientation of their own organization gave them two very different, even incompatible, bases on which to differentiate themselves from the civil rights movement.

SDS's views on race, moreover, were inextricable from their views on war. This connection went beyond the mere historical fact that, in the mid-twentieth-century, the U.S. threw its military muscle into proxy wars against people of color perceived as vulnerable to Soviet influence. Here, I am less interested in SDS's anti-war and anti-draft

activism and more interested in what discussions of war and conscription revealed about the group's investment in authenticity. In addition to loss of life, violation of individual freedom, and imposition of one nation on another, SDS members argued, military service took away both people's humanity and their ability to see the humanity in other people. This became a self-perpetuating cycle that would only breed future wars. Thus, the more totalizing were the dehumanizing effects of war, the more important were the examples of supposedly non-mechanized people of color.

Even a single person, such as Tom Hayden, could see the civil rights movement as simultaneously too political and not political enough. Hayden spent significant portions of 1961 and 1962 in the South, participating in and reporting on events in the civil rights movement, including the freedom rides led first by the Congress of Racial Equity (CORE) and then by the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). In December 1961, his participation in these events led to him spending a night in jail in Albany, Georgia. The following spring, he offered his analysis of recent developments in the movement for racial equality. The civil rights movement, he argued, was "heartening and exemplary in this period of inactive democracy. It is heartening because of the justice it insists on, exemplary because it shows men everywhere that there can be a passage out of apathy." He was particularly cheered by the fact that "the Negro movement has responded" to oppositional forces "by entering the sphere of politics, insisting on adopting the role of *citizen* as defined long ago by Aristotle as taking part in the 'deliberative or judicial administration of the state.'" Hayden found the new focus on voter registration engendered by this recent "politicization" a welcome corrective in a movement whose "moral clarity...has not always been accompanied by precise political

vision, and sometimes not even by a real political consciousness.” In this view, a visceral understanding of inequality was no match for the “conventional instruments of political democracy.”⁵⁰ While James Miller gently chides this view as “almost patronizing,” it is clearly better described as deeply condescending.⁵¹

This assessment of the civil rights movement also made its way into the Port Huron Statement, which clearly drew on Hayden’s earlier piece. Although certainly racial equality was a goal to which SDS members were committed, their commitment was tinged with paternalism. Their paternalism clearly lay in their narrow definition of politics, which allowed them to see only recent civil rights developments such as voter registration drives as political. The young people involved in the civil rights movement, per this view, had needed to be taught how to “do” a political movement: as a National Student Association publication put it, “They have little knowledge of procedures and entariled [*sic*] in writing newsletters, press releases, reports, etc., so their ability to analyse and report their activities is limited. They do not have a functioning adult structure to provide a framework for their operations; such a structure as exists is usually a paper organization with no active program they are capable of implementing.”⁵²

In an example of a trend that grew more pronounced over the course of the 1960s, the Port Huron Statement also made it clear that the importance of the civil rights movement to SDS members lay not only in the laudable goal of racial equality: it also had a role to play in furthering their own moral vision. Specifically, the Statement

⁵⁰Tom Hayden, “RE: ‘Race and Politics’ Conference – Chapel Hill, N.C., May 4-6,” 1962, series 1, no. 4, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

⁵¹ Miller, 99.

⁵²National Student Association publication, undated, series 1, no. 17, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

expanded on Hayden's earlier description of the civil rights movement as an "exemplary...passage out of apathy." It revealed to young whites that there were, as the title of the section noted, "alternatives to helplessness." "The goals we have set," it ultimately read,

are not realizable next month, or even next election—but that fact justifies neither giving up altogether nor a determination to work only on immediate, direct, tangible problems. Both responses are a sign of helplessness, fearfulness of visions, refusal to hope, and tend to bring on the very conditions to be avoided. Fearing vision, we justify rhetoric or myopia. Fearing hope, we reinforce despair.⁵³

Part of the significance of the civil rights movement for Tom Hayden and others was its function as a handmaiden for their own salvation. It showed them that the alienation they were experiencing was not inevitable and could be overcome. This perspective also denigrated the very "political" goals the organization elsewhere had lauded.

By 1967, several factors had conspired to make the link between people of color and the possibility of escape from inauthenticity *for white radicals* even more prominent in SDS members' minds. First, they were aware of an internationally-developing post-colonial theory. In both *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon argued that colonized peoples were forced to wear masks—to adopt a form of inauthenticity that alienated them from their true selves.⁵⁴ SDS literature in the second half of the 1960s abounded with references to Fanon, but members seem to have identified more with the colonized than with the colonizers. That is, they were concerned with their own inauthenticity, not the inauthenticity they may have forced on others.

⁵³Hayden, Port Huron Statement.

⁵⁴ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles L. Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967); Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963). *The Wretched of the Earth*, translated into English just two years after its French publication, had a much greater impact on the U.S. than *Black Skin, White Masks*, which remained untranslated for fifteen years.

Similarly, when SNCC president Stokely Carmichael, who was also influenced by Fanon, closed his organization to whites in 1966 and urged them to work to end racism in white communities, he did not predict that white radicals would turn to ending their own *oppression*.

1967's "In White America," an essay written by former Iowa State University student and then-SDS National Secretary Greg Calvert, was the best example of the purpose people of color served for SDS members—not political actors in their own right, but, due to their perceived greater authenticity, evidence that the mechanization of humanity was incomplete. Originally a speech given at a Radical Education Project conference held at Princeton University, Calvert's piece is best known for its theory of the new working class, the key SDS idea that ostensibly middle-class people (including students) experienced no more control over their lives and labor than did the working classes, and thus were the population from which social change should emanate. Most interesting to me, however, is Calvert's insistence that revolutionary movements were always and fundamentally about reclaiming one's own humanity and recognizing this humanity in others. "Authentically revolutionary movements," in his words, were always "struggles for human freedom." Moreover, those who (like himself and his cohort) had experienced "alienation" from "America-the-Obscene-and-the-Dehumanized" could learn from these movements how to be human again—how to escape from the machine.⁵⁵

Symptomatic of our larger analytical differences, Doug Rossinow notes Calvert's

⁵⁵Greg Calvert, "In White America: Radical Consciousness and Social Change," February, 1967, series 3, no. 4, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

emphasis on authenticity and alienation, but not the fears of mechanization and massification to which these concerns were connected.⁵⁶

The example Calvert chose to illustrate the principles of authentic revolution, that of Guatemalan guerillas attempting to politicize poor villagers, will no doubt sound oddly familiar to those with some knowledge of the social movements of the 1960s. His words are worth quoting here at some length:

It is said that when the Guatemalan guerrillas enter a new village, they do not talk about the “anti-imperialist struggle” nor do they give lessons on dialectical materialism—neither do they distribute copies of the “Communist Manifesto” or of Chairman Mao’s “On Contradiction.” What they do is gather together the people of the village in the center of the village and then, one by one, the guerrillas rise and talk to the villagers about their own lives: about how they see themselves and how they came to be who they are, about their deepest longings and the things they’ve striven for and hoped for, about the way in which their deepest longings were frustrated by the society in which they live. Then the guerrillas encourage the villagers to talk about their lives. And then a marvelous thing begins to happen. People who thought that their problems and frustrations were their individual problems discover that their problems and longings are all the same—that no man is any different than the others... And, finally, that out of the discovery of their common humanity comes the decision that men must unite together in the struggle to destroy the conditions of their common oppression.⁵⁷

“Authentically revolutionary movements,” then, depended on people’s ability to express their most deeply-held thoughts, feelings, and beliefs. Sounding very much like both Tennessee Williams and a women’s liberationist advocating consciousness raising, Calvert argued that political consciousness emanated from the sharing of authentic personal experiences and the resulting realization that these experiences were often not unique. Yet, as chapter eight will show, SDS found these processes less laudable when they were borrowed by American women.

⁵⁶Rossinow, 195-6.

⁵⁷Calvert, “In White America.”

Moreover, part of the importance Calvert attributed to the example of the Guatemalan guerillas lay in what is suggested about the means to his *own* liberation. The key, in his view, was not for well-meaning, middle-class white liberals to *sympathize* with oppressed peoples around the world (although certainly third-world revolutionaries were to be supported), but rather to recognize that they themselves were similarly oppressed, that they experienced a similar “unfreedom.” This equation rested on a careful massaging of the definition of oppression as not primarily or fundamentally a material condition, but rather a spiritual one in which the “development of human potentiality” was stymied. That is, while oppression *may* take the form of the material deprivation of food, shelter, currency, and the like, at its heart it was the prevention of human self-actualization. As Calvert put it, “the gap is not between oneself, what one is, and the underprivileged but is the gap between ‘what one could be’ and the existing conditions for self-realization.” Only through this understanding of oppression could materially privileged, ostensibly middle-class people (Calvert’s new working class) break through the “false consciousness” that led them to believe that they were the authors of their own destinies. Under a more capacious, more abstract definition of oppression, white-collar workers had no more control over their lives than did poor Guatemalan peasants, an analysis that clearly owed an intellectual debt to the plaintive 1950s cries about the autonomy lost by “the man in the gray flannel suit.” Calvert, however, offered a more optimistic spin on these developments, for it was in recognizing one’s own lack of control that meaningful social change could begin to take place.⁵⁸ As Doug Rossinow notes, “the new left...elevated alienation above poverty as the core of oppression. Alienation became simultaneously the polar opposite of authenticity and the sign of

⁵⁸Ibid.

authentic political agency.”⁵⁹ Calvert’s definition of oppression as alienation from one’s true self also brings further into question David Barber’s assertion that encounters with racial otherness led SDS members to an awareness of the constructedness of their own identities.⁶⁰

Through the work of the “new radicals” (SDS members), the transformation Calvert hoped for had already begun. Interestingly, Calvert was critical of the humanism of the early SDS, chastising its members’ “failure to understand the dynamics of the society which produced their gut-level alienation, that is their failure to understand that what seemed humanly and emotionally real could be understood in terms of a fundamental and critical analysis of American corporate-liberal capitalism.” This failure, he argued, left them “impotent and romantic.” Now, however, thanks to the examples set by Guatemalan revolutionaries and others, young Americans were beginning to understand the connection between the “crying out of their own being” to “the greater reality of American society in a way which authenticates their own revolt as a realistic basis for understanding the way in which we can be freed.” They were beginning to combine their deeply felt, but ultimately apolitical (in that it did not imply collective action) howl-like demand, “I want freedom,” with a “revolutionary socialist analysis which points the way to collective liberation.”⁶¹

Calvert’s remarks would surely have resonated at a separate education conference held later that year. There, an introductory paper posited a similar relationship among

⁵⁹ Rossinow, 196.

⁶⁰ Barber, 9.

⁶¹ Calvert, “In White America.”

African Americans, Vietnamese freedom fighters, and white, middle-class American radicals wherein the struggles of the first two groups made the third aware of their *own* oppression. As college students, these remarks went, young radicals had felt “a vague but hurting sense of dissatisfaction,” but they were too mired in “programmed isolation” to comprehend the provenance of that dissatisfaction. Soon, though, two groups—African Americans and Vietnamese rebels—would break through “the barriers and structures of isolation,” proving to the young, white radicals that it was possible to fight against oppression. Through their involvement with these other people’s struggles, they developed a desire to fight their own battles. In particular, they singled out the relationship between the university and the military-industrial complex, which made them complicit in the project of U.S. imperialism. Those in power, however, did not welcome students’ activism, and so, the author(s) put it, “we got repressed: just as black people and Vietnamese people had been repressed for attacking and exposing their colonial control.” This false equivalency allowed SDS members to identify with colonized peoples even as they acknowledged their status as members-in-waiting of the ruling class: “We have learned that colonialism depends on sectoring off the colonized from each other while they are prepared to accept and/or participate in the colonial system.” In the minds of white, middle-class radicals, what they gained from the experiences of African Americans and Vietnamese freedom fighters was the ability to see through the veneer of privilege to understand their own oppression. The struggles of people of color, in this view, were important less for their own sake and more for how their appropriation allowed middle-class whites to imagine themselves.⁶²

⁶²Introductory Paper for Education Conference, December, 1967, series 4D, no. 8, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

Many of these key elements of SDS racial thought could also be seen in their almost universally rhapsodic descriptions of life in Fidel Castro's Cuba, posited as a bastion of individualism in a world otherwise determined to take it away. The young writer of a piece titled "The Answer," written for a special Cuba-themed issue of SDS's short-lived literary magazine, *Caw!*, agreed with this assessment. Even before his trip, he wrote, he expected to like Cuba in part because he knew it would make him "*feel* something." And, indeed, what impressed him most about the nation was not its socialist infrastructure but rather the human transformation he witnessed, so different from the "growing alienation of human beings" he perceived in the U.S. Interestingly, the example that the author felt best illustrated both Cuba's own transformation and its differences from the U.S. was the status of women in both nations. In the U.S., he argued, gender equality had come about as an "unnaturally forced solution" that led to "new problems," not only the aforementioned alienation but also the development of an entirely new industry of experts—"the men we create to solve the problems we create." By contrast, in Cuba gender equality had ostensibly come about as a natural outcome of the revolution: once "real life—and death—ha[d] been shared," it was impossible to maintain the myth of women's inferiority. The author also attributed Cubans' greater freedom from repressive social structures to the youth of the revolutionary leadership. Although these leaders were indeed young in the concrete sense, he defined youth not so much in terms of physical age but as an attitude of freedom in direct contrast to the "either real or assumed" greater age of those who had fled Cuba for the U.S. With young people in charge, he saw "the nature of all human drives to capacity, including sex, love, being, man and woman moving in their true dimension, neither breaking under the weight

of an IBM equalizer nor stagnating under the patched up double standard Latin code of ‘morality.’” As the author saw it, his firsthand observations served as a direct refutation of the popular understanding of socialism as inhuman and mechanical. This was the view promulgated by philosopher William Barrett’s 1958 *The Irrational Man*, popular even among those whom the author of “The Answer” considered kindred spirits. Barrett argued, “Marxist manuals of philosophy refer to all philosophies that deal with the human subject as forms of ‘irrationalism.’ *Their* rationalism, of course, consists in technical intelligence, in the power over things (and over men considered as things); and this exalting of the technical intelligence over every other human attribute becomes demonical in action...” Barrett, that is, trod the familiar territory holding that socialism and communism did little more than reduce human beings to cogs in a machine. However, the author of “The Answer” found based on his experiences in Cuba that this “couldn’t be further from the truth!” In his view, it was precisely humanistic individualism that socialism sought to save and exalt: “Socialism,” he wrote, “emphasizes all other human attributes: dignity, talent, need, beauty, the right to eat, sleep, learn, keep healthy, in other words, and very surely, ‘the pursuit of happiness!’” In this view, socialism was not a threat to, but rather a guardian of, humanity’s fundamental birthright of individuality.⁶³

It is little mystery, then, why a piece such as Che Guevara’s 1965 “Man and Socialism in Cuba,” in which he explicitly took on these competing views of socialism, would resonate with SDS members. Originally written in the form of a letter to Carlos Quijano, editor of a radical publication in Uruguay, “Man and Socialism in Cuba”

⁶³William Barrett, *The Irrational Man*, quoted in “The Answer,” in *Caw!*, 1968, series 4A, no. 4, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

attempted to refute the notion that “socialism...is characterized by the subordination of the individual to the state.” Rather, Guevara argued, “man [alternatively referred to as “the individual”] was the basic factor” in the revolution: “We put our trust in him—individual, specific, with a first and last name—and the triumph or failure of the mission entrusted to him completely on his capacity for action.” Guevara did not dispute that post-revolutionary Cuban society was divided into several different groups, including the leadership, or vanguard (most importantly Fidel Castro himself), and “the mass.” He even acknowledged that, “viewed superficially, it might appear that those who speak of the subordination of the individual to the state are right. The mass carries out with matchless enthusiasm and discipline the tasks set by the government, whether economic in character, cultural, defensive, athletic, or whatever.” It was not true, however, that “the mass” reduced individuals to mindless automatons; it was not, “as is claimed, the sum of units of the self-same type, behaving like a tame flock of sheep, and reduced, moreover, to that type by the system imposed from above.” Rather, Guevara argued, “the mass” responded to its leaders only inasmuch as, and in direct proportion to, the extent to which those leaders functioned as manifestations of the people’s hopes and desires. The people loved and exalted Castro, that is, not because they had been brainwashed into doing so but rather because he so perfectly responded to their needs. When occasionally the state made mistakes, the enthusiasm of the mass would dwindle, and the state would make the necessary corrections. Thus, while it was true that the mass was being led and educated by the vanguard, they were only being led where they already wanted to go.⁶⁴

⁶⁴Che Guevara, “Man and Socialism in Cuba,” 1965, series 4B, no. 130, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

Only under socialism, Guevara went on to argue, could people attain their full humanity. Under capitalism, the individual was an isolated and alienated figure; trained to believe in the myth of the self-made man, he (Guevara used gender-specific language throughout) turned his back on his fellow human beings in order to selfishly pursue his own profit. It was thus capitalism, not socialism, that forced people to act in accordance with an official ideology imposed from above, in the process depriving them of important aspects of the human experience. It was, additionally, capitalism, not socialism, that turned human beings into machines, for, as Guevara put it, “man dominated by commodity relationships will cease to exist.” As in Fromm, Marcuse, and the SDS discourse on automation described in chapter five, it was when they were seen solely as instruments to bring about profit that people were deprived of their individuality. By contrast, in laying bare the lies that dictated people’s behavior under capitalism, socialism allowed people to be both individuals and members of a bigger community or cause: “Man under socialism, despite his apparent standardization, is more complete; despite the lack of perfect machinery for it, his opportunities for expressing himself and making himself felt in the social organism are infinitely greater.” This, again, was due to the perfectly transparent relationship that Guevara saw between the revolutionary leaders and their people. Moreover, by making man, and not profits, the measure of a society’s worth, socialism thwarted the dehumanization wrought by capitalism. As Guevara ultimately concluded, “we socialists are freer because we are more complete; we are more complete because we are freer.” Freed from either the pursuit of their own wealth or as instruments of another’s, people could reclaim their individuality and humanity by making common cause with their fellows.⁶⁵

⁶⁵Ibid.

Importantly, this romanticization of third-world peoples and/or, as in the case of Cuba, communists, as exemplars of humanistic individuality took place against the backdrop of an escalating war in Vietnam and, ultimately, widespread conscription in the U.S. According to SDS logic, conscription carried the threat of mechanization to its most logical conclusion; the conscript had been denied all that made him truly human. Indeed, as early as the spring of 1963, SDS members were concerned with the effects conscription had on individuality. Todd Gitlin, who had recently joined the organization and would soon be elected its president, was planning on spending the summer conducting a study of the draft. Among the subjects he wanted to explore were the “psychological effects” of the draft: “How heavily does the draft contribute to growing up absurd, to insecurity, to the ‘cult of coolness,’ to the erosion of adult emotion?” He worried that conscription took away young people’s ability to feel, and thus to be truly human.⁶⁶ Over the next several years, Gitlin would continue to be among the voices insisting that the war be seen in human terms; like Carl Oglesby, who hoped that bringing a poor Vietnamese man to the U.S. would enable Americans to appreciate the human cost of the war, Gitlin hoped to bring a group of American students to Vietnam “to help rebuild a hospital or school destroyed by American bombings.” In addition to obvious material benefits, he believed that such a mission would “bring home to people, in elemental human terms, and as close to first-hand as possible, the immeasurable evil the U.S. is perpetuating.”⁶⁷

⁶⁶Todd [Gitlin] to Dick [Flacks?], May 31, 1963, series 2C, no. 2, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

⁶⁷Todd Gitlin, Proposal for a Mission to North Viet-Nam, undated, series 2A, no. 65, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

In early 1967, a letter sent to SDS member John Fournelle from a young conscript addressed the issue of dehumanization more urgently. Fournelle forwarded this letter to other SDS members but left out identifying details about its author, a nineteen-year-old acquaintance going through basic training while waiting for papers declaring his status as a conscientious objector to go through. While the author acknowledged that “the Army is basically a physical thing,” he had no doubt that “mental indoctrination” was an important part of the process. As he saw it, this indoctrination was intended to instill not only “extreme nationalism” and hatred of other peoples but also conformity. For example, “short hair cuts are to make us all look alike,” while “sameness in uniforms” was intended “to take our identities away from us.” The author concluded, “I am not politically oriented, but I know complete moral decay when I see it, and Lyndon Johnson is spreading it all over the place.”⁶⁸ As another young man in an identical situation put it two years later, the military at its core was “a brutal, inhuman system” determined to fit its members into standardized boxes.⁶⁹

In an undated essay titled “Citizens and Soldiers,” Philip Andreeli addressed the truly disastrous effects of turning humans into machines, especially through conscription but also through the broader training aimed at all of a nation’s people. As long as people realized that both they and others were thinking, feeling individuals who shared a common humanity, he argued, they would be incapable of killing one another. Thus, in order to mobilize for war, the state had a vested interest in eliminating this shared humanity: it “brainwashed” its citizens into believing other peoples were not fully human so that they might better “tolerate their mechanization for the purpose of slaughtering an

⁶⁸To John Fournelle, February 1967, series 3, no. 1, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

⁶⁹Mark Rudel, Press Release, undated [1969], series 4D, no. 9, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

‘enemy.’” They were trained to see the enemy not as humans but “as automatic bodies, or as robots, or as quasi-vermin.” At best, this resulted in a citizenry reduced to the level of “unthinking animals” or an “anarchic and groveling mass.” At worst, it resulted in a “mechanized human; one who is made without feeling on the model of a machine.” Quoting Thoreau, Andreeli argued that these mechanized humans “serve the State...as machines.”⁷⁰

Members of these “state slaves,” the author went on to suggest, were incapable of citizenship. Indeed, he concluded that

the citizen and the soldier are irreconcilable opposites. Where people are mechanized and brutalized to become and support soldiers, they become incapable of citizenship. Where, on the other hand, people develop as human beings in their capacity to recognize one another as persons, they become incapable of soldiering and the support of the war.⁷¹

Thus “mechanized,” “brutalized,” and “brainwashed by nationalistic propaganda,” civilians and soldiers alike lost the ability to question authority, capable only of blindly following the path determined by their leaders. In this way, Andreeli concluded, societies organized around war sowed the seeds of their own destruction. Turning citizens into mindless automatons not only rendered a vibrant public sphere of debate impossible, but also produced a society capable only of endless warfare. “As a nation,” Andreeli wrote, “the United States is going the way of Rome, with its mindless course as predictable as that of a lead sphere when released from the hand which holds it.” The future looked

⁷⁰Philip Andreeli, “Citizens and Soldiers,” undated, series 3, no. 97, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

⁷¹Ibid.

grim indeed “for the minority in whom remains the potential for citizenship, and who desire a world in which human beings can live and develop as persons.”⁷²

By turning individuals into machines, war took away one’s humanity even if it did not take away one’s life. Andreoli’s piece sheds new light on why SDS members addressed the issues of technology and mass society with such urgency. For a society to continue functioning, it was crucial that each member’s authentic humanity be recognized and given room to be expressed. The only alternative, members believed, was a culture full of brainwashed, zombie-like automatons—and one headed for its own destruction.

In imagining their idealistic vision of political engagement both within and outside the United States, SDS members developed a theory of participatory democracy that relied on peeling away the layers of socially imposed falsehoods that usually governed one’s interactions with the world. Only when people were able to reveal the “true selves” nestled underneath the years and decades of training in “acceptable” feelings and behaviors could they escape massification and become fully-formed human beings capable of individual thought and action. For these reasons, SDS privileged a humanism that made individual thoughts, feelings, and experiences the *only* bastion of truth and thus the *only* place from which politics could spring. No political theory or ideology, be it Marxism or free-market capitalism, could hold a candle to the knowledge gleaned from human experience. Yet, members also yearned to find a theory that did not reduce people to an unthinking mass. This ambivalence extended to their views of the civil rights movement, which seemed either too narrowly political or not political enough. People of color, moreover, showed young, white radicals that it was possible to break

⁷²Ibid.

free from a mechanized society in order to reclaim their humanity, a hope that grew increasingly urgent in the face of an escalating war and eventual widespread conscription. People of color also revealed to whites the similar form of oppression they themselves supposedly experienced—one in which their authentic individuality had been suppressed in order to serve the needs of capitalism and the military-industrial complex.

Between 1965-1969, the idealistic humanism that characterized SDS's first five years and that has been discussed in the previous two chapters slowly waned, replaced in the face of ever more visible American imperialism with an increasingly ideologically-driven militancy. In my eighth and final chapter, I will move to a more thorough parsing of this shift and how the women's liberation movement, many members of which were veterans of SDS, responded to it with a replay of the debate between feelings and program. Before doing so, I will devote my next chapter to another key difference between the Old and New Left, one that was concomitant with the later movement's rejection of systems and ideologies. In the 1930s, as Michael Denning has beautifully described, a "cultural front" of workers, artists, and intellectuals confident that cultural products could be put in the service of progressive politics flourished. In the 1960s, I argue, SDS's investment in authenticity, which led them to see explicitly political art as a dehumanizing harbinger of totalitarianism, precluded such a possibility. However, I also identify a "cultural convergence" of artists attempting to apply the SDS vision of participatory democracy to the realm of culture. These attempts, I ultimately argue, also reflected back on SDS itself, shedding yet new light of how its members conceived of authenticity and selfhood.

Chapter Seven: “Exit Thirties, Enter Sixties”: Participatory Democracy, Performance Theory, and the Cultural Convergence

“Andy Warhol turns his camera on people who live to perform, whose very mode of authenticity is performance. We see the pictures and wonder if these performers are ‘that way in real life.’ But the question is meaningless in an existence where, as R.D. Laing points out, people can pretend to be who they really are. The space without edges is also an identity without identification.” —Richard Schechner, “Negotiations with Environment”¹

This chapter concludes my analysis of the role authenticity played in New Left thought. It pursues three objectives. First, it argues that Students for a Democratic Society’s investment in authenticity precluded support for politically didactic art, which explains why the 1960s left did not produce the same sort of “cultural front” that coalesced within the 1930s Popular Front. Nevertheless, there were artists who applied to their creative endeavors the values that SDS members hoped to realize in the political sphere. The second goal of this chapter is to explore this “cultural convergence.” I do so through an analysis of the experimental theatre of Richard Schechner and The Performance Group, whose work in the late 1960s and 1970s embodied New Left politics. However, my discussion of experimental theatre also reveals deeper connections between the cultural and political realms. Pursuing this chapter’s final objective, I argue that the link between SDS and performance studies, the field that emerged in part from Schechner’s work, adds a crucial element to how we should characterize the white New Left’s understanding of identity: it was at once authentic and performative, simultaneously a unique inner quality and an external expression, or performance, of

¹ Richard Schechner, “Negotiations with Environment,” in Schechner, *Public Domain: Essays on the Theatre* (New York: Avon, 1969), 196. The piece was written in 1968.

one's true self. In making these arguments, I draw not only on the SDS archival records used in the previous two chapters, but also on published and unpublished plays, correspondences, journal entries, and articles written by Schechner and others in The Performance Group.

Despite the presence of a flourishing counterculture that at times intersected with the New Left's values and constituencies, no coalition of artists, intellectuals, activists, and workers analogous to the 1930s cultural front emerged in the 1960s. By then, earlier attempts to infuse culture with a hint of class-based materialism—Marx's idea that material conditions created reality—seemed quaint, idealistic, or even misguided. The relationship between culture and politics would factor into 1960s social movements, but in very different ways from the 1930s. In a 1965 letter written to members of SDS's community-organizing program, the Economic Research and Action Project (ERAP), then-president Carl Oglesby made this crucial distinction from the Old Left perfectly clear. He dismissed the idea of an ERAP theatre project, which he saw as mired in “nostalgia about the ‘30s.” He understood well the appeal of such a project, which

so closely resembles the functional structure of social organizing. A theatre assumes a crowd, it makes a single audience out of many individuals, gives them a common rhythm of feeling, reacting, insight; focus, too, sometimes even purpose, makes compact what was diffuse, gives direction to what was random and ambient. And this is something like what ERAP projects want to do?²

ERAP projects sought to harness the abstract discontent of the working classes, give it a name, and turn it to the pursuit of concrete changes. Yet, in Oglesby's view, using theatre to achieve this goal would not only be a misallocation of precious material

²Carl Oglesby to Roger and Rennie, February 12, 1965, series 4C, no. 1, Students for a Democratic Society Papers (Glen Rock, N.J.: Microfilming Corp. of America, 1977), microfilm [hereafter “Students for a Democratic Society Papers”].

resources, but also would necessarily impose a top-down structure on local problems. “The theatre-project,” he argued, “doesn’t seem to arise as a possible solution to a perceived set of local problems.” That is, a theatre project was inherently at odds with participatory democracy, for its logistics would bump up against SDS’s suspicion of systematic or prescriptive thought and desire to pursue only those solutions that emanated from the true thoughts and feelings of a particular group of people in a specific place, time, and situation. Oglesby was also reluctant to embrace theatre as an effective means of “wak[ing] up this dumb sleep-walking giant” when such attempts had never worked in the past: “thinking of young Odets and the Federal theatre people (who failed), of Brecht and Piscator (who failed), of Sartre and Camus (who failed), we wonder...if it isn’t maybe in the artwork that a few can catalyze the buried crippled decency or just realism of the many, make a big conscience or turn loose a few angry angels.”³

It was not that Oglesby felt art had nothing to contribute to the left. Indeed, he hoped that artists’ “fundamentally humanist morality” could be combined with a greater “attention to the nation’s [political] life” in order to make them “partisan[s] of the left.” His hope, however, lay not in producing explicitly political art, but rather in cultivating artists whose work reminded people of their fundamental humanity. Immediately after rejecting the idea of an ERAP theatre project, he described his own plan for compiling an anthology of “new writing about the open American sores,” enlisting an all-male group of such established writers as Norman Mailer, J.D. Salinger, Jack Kerouac, Leroi Jones (Amiri Baraka), James Baldwin, and poet Robert Lowell. Though he acknowledged the ambition of this list, he hoped that “it would take a bastard to say no” to pleas “that there

³Ibid.

are people drowning out there in *The Great American Night* who can use a little voice—an outcry in their names.” Interestingly, Oglesby perceived no threat to authenticity in this plan that provided art to a community rather than giving community members the resources to produce their own art.

Oglesby felt that a particular strength of this list of writers was that it was “an indiscriminate list, one that is completely nonsectarian.” At first glance, it is remarkable that Oglesby felt that a conservative Republican and supporter of Richard Nixon like Jack Kerouac would have important contributions to make to the movement. Upon closer examination of SDS’s politics, however, it makes perfect sense, for what many of the writers on Oglesby’s list had in common was an investment in authenticity, a view of the individual as threatened by the repressive forces of society. Ultimately, it mattered more to SDS members that art reflect the artist’s insides than a particular political perspective. In this way their views were much more 1950s than 1930s. SDS’s emphasis on authentic self-expression also put their aesthetic sensibility at odds with their politics, which included a consistent desire to formulate structural explanations for war, poverty, and inequality. As explored in earlier chapters, this tension was a fundamental conflict in SDS thought, as their fears about losing their humanity constantly bumped up against their political goals.⁴

Concomitantly, artists themselves were important to SDS members’ view of the world less for the art they produced and more for their status as human beings whose individuality remained somewhat intact despite the constant pressure of society, which made them useful models for young people intent on breaking free from this repressive machine. For these reasons, it made perfect sense, for example, for SDS members to

⁴Ibid.

describe the goal of education alternately as to “find a way for people to be free, to be human”⁵ and to live like artists, to “follow the lead of those who are imaginative, truly radical and sensitive, the artist, writer, musician, and poet” and allow for people (borrowing from Nietzsche) to “build their lives as if they were creating art”⁶: in the minds of many SDS members, the meaning of each statement was identical. SDS members saw artists as more in touch with their bodies, emotions, and senses. By contrast, they felt that they themselves were “really ‘unfree’—not because we do not have the potential to express the thoughts and feelings within us—and to express them in very beautiful and unusual ways—but because we have never learned to use this potential.”⁷ What SDS members desired, and what artists seemed to represent, was liberation.

The relationship between SDS and the arts would thus focus more on cultivating what was perceived as the inherent nature of the artist—the perfect outer expression of inner thoughts and feelings—in all people than on the creation of actual art reflecting their political goals. Taking one step further Carl Oglesby’s fears that an ERAP theatre project would inevitably impose top-down solutions on local problems, the founders of SDS’s Radical Education Program feared that an insistence on “political” art would threaten the very basis of the organization’s human-centered morality, turning humans once more into cogs in a machine:

The humanism which provides the moral basis of the movement is often distorted and narrowed by an almost philistine preoccupation with the purely political. Art

⁵“To Blue and Other People,” July 29, 1965, series 2A, no. 42, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

⁶Rich Horevitz to Carolyn Craven, July 28, 1965, series 2A, no. 42, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

⁷“To Blue and Other People,” July 29, 1965.

is often seen as an instrument of propaganda and the artist as a 'resource' who should subordinate his particular talent to the immediate poster and pamphlet needs of the movement. In this, the movement perverts its own utopian ideal of a society where personal creativity is valued and each man is encouraged to develop and express the best that is within him.⁸

Explicitly political art, in other words, was at odds with the authenticity—the ability of people to express what was deep inside themselves—so valued by the organization.

Harnessing a person's talent to serve a goal other than their own self-expression turned the artist from subject and creator into an object to be manipulated.

There was, however, what could be termed a cultural convergence in the 1960s, a movement in which artists applied to their creative endeavors the changes SDS members hoped to implement in the political sphere. Richard Schechner's experimental theatre provides one remarkable example of this convergence. As editor of the *Tulane Drama Review* (later *The Drama Review*), director of such companies as The Performance Group, and professor in New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, Schechner, starting in the late 1960s, became one of the seminal figures in the development of performance studies, a field that extended the concept of "performance" beyond formal theatrical productions, often drawing on anthropological perspectives. Performance studies sought to break down the separation between both performers and audience members and art and everyday life. In doing so, its architects extended SDS's concept of participatory democracy into the realm of drama, recreating there the former's strengths and weaknesses alike.

⁸Draft for Discussion and Comment, March 20, 1966, series 3, no. 1, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

Several areas of overlap connected SDS thought and the aesthetic sensibilities of experimental theatre and performance studies. First, the members and practitioners of each were deeply invested in authenticity, which scholar Mike Vanden Heuvel calls one of “the most prized aesthetic aims of the period.”⁹ As Martin Pucher sees it, the “authentic bodily expressions” sought by The Performance Group were a way of countering the “elaborate artifice” in which performers were often trained.¹⁰ Both SDS and The Performance Group, moreover, sought to undo the programming that led people to adopt conventional behaviors and circumscribed expressions. Indeed, members of the Group sought to reveal their “true selves” not only spiritually (as did other individuals and groups discussed in this dissertation, including SDS members), but also literally: in 1969, members of the Group were arrested after a performance at the University of Michigan of their first play, *Dionysus in 69*, in which all performers at one point or another appeared nude.¹¹ Like the SDS members who hoped to undo the training by which their true selves has been buried under a socially acceptable veneer, Schechner associated nakedness with “turning the inside out, or projecting onto the surfaces of the body events of the depths.”¹² Nakedness was both a stripping away of self-protective, inauthentic armor and an excavation of the true, inner self. “Psychic nakedness and

⁹ Mike Vanden Heuvel, “A Different Kind of Pomo: The Performance Group and the Mixed Legacy of Authentic Performance,” in James M. Harding and Cindy Rosenthal, eds., *Restaging the Sixties: Radical Theaters and Their Legacies* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 333.

¹⁰ Martin Pucher, “The Performance Group between Theater and Theory,” in in James M. Harding and Cindy Rosenthal, eds., *Restaging the Sixties: Radical Theaters and Their Legacies* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 314.

¹¹ For several documents that relate to the arrests and ensuing legal struggles, see folder 173.1, Richard Schechner Papers and The Drama Review Collection, Princeton University Library, Princeton, NJ [hereafter “Richard Schechner Papers”].

¹² Richard Schechner, “Nakedness,” in Schechner, *Environmental Theater* (New York: Applause, 1973), 87.

physical nakedness are sometimes identical,”¹³ the director argued; moreover, he believed that “this act of spiritual nakedness is all there is to performing...the performer’s own self is exteriorized and transformed into the scenic givens of the production.”¹⁴ The confessionalism of Method acting was literalized in exercises such as “Display,” in which performers took turns responding to requests to see certain body parts,¹⁵ and “Dressing and Undressing,” in which a performer stood in the center of a circle of her or his peers and told a story about her/himself while taking off and putting back on her/his clothes.¹⁶

SDS members would also have found in The Performance Group (TPG) a more general corrective to their frequent complaint that they felt disconnected from their bodies. The “affirmation of the body” inherent in nakedness was only one aspect of the importance the Group placed on body work. Based on the theories of Polish director Jerzy Grotowski, who believed that truth could be found only in physicality, Richard Schechner encouraged his actors to participate in “psychophysical” exercises that “relate[d] the body to the mind in such a way that the two apparently separate systems are one.”¹⁷ To Grotowski, too, this emphasis on physicality was intended as a way of revealing the performer’s true self: “The actor,” he wrote, “is a human being who has

¹³ Ibid., 122.

¹⁴ Richard Schechner, “Performer,” in Schechner, *Environmental Theater* (New York: Applause, 1973), 126.

¹⁵ Schechner, “Nakedness,” 92.

¹⁶ Schechner, “Performer,” 148.

¹⁷ The Performance Group, *Dionysus in 69*, ed. Richard Schechner (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1970).

dis/covered and un/covered himself so much that he re/veals [=unveils] something of man. He is the miracle.”¹⁸ As TPG member Jason Bosseau put it,

I am not interested in acting. I am involved in the life process of becoming whole. I do many technical exercises which organically suit that process. They act as a catalyst for my ability to let my essence flow, to let my soul speak through my mind and body. The impulse becomes the action. The body is free to fly. The mind is liberated from tensions of the body, and flows with sounds, feelings, vibrations, everything. Everything becomes/is the flow. Mind/body are one. Thoughts/feelings/sounds/movements/ vibrations are one. The flow pounds in my being, pulsates, jerks, explodes, retreats, bounces, settles, redefines itself, reintegrates itself, and feeds everything from the depths of my gut to the outermost limitlessness of the universe.¹⁹

Productions themselves were highly physical, with staging often as complex and tactile (not to mention symbolic) as the choreography of a dance or acrobatic troupe.

The authenticity sought by Schechner and his colleagues was of a different brand than that pursued at such institutions as the Actors Studio. Turning the logic of Lee Strasberg’s Method acting on its head, Schechner argued that affective memory, because it was a “conditioned response” that could only ever provide for “a duplication of the original response” rather than creating something wholly new, actually produced *unreal* acting. He found “child’s play,” in which children imagined experiences they had never actually had, to be a more appropriate analogy for acting.²⁰ In this, he echoed to a certain extent Stella Adler’s insistence on action.

Indeed, Schechner drew on precedent more than he liked to admit. Despite his desire to “exit thirties,” Schechner’s critique of conventional theatre linked him to the 1930s theories of Bertolt Brecht. It also recreated the debate between set designer and

¹⁸ Quoted in Schechner, “Performer,” 128.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Richard Schechner, “Exit Thirties, Enter Sixties,” in Schechner, *Public Domain: Essays on the Theatre* (New York: Avon, 1969), 19-21. The piece was written in 1965.

theatre theorist Mordecai Gorelik and playwright and screenwriter John Howard Lawson following Gorelik's condemnation of "illusory" theatre in his 1940 book *New Theatres for Old*.²¹ In his emphasis on self-revelation, Schechner was also more similar to Strasberg than he realized. Like the SDS members who were his analogues in the political realm, Schechner both outwardly rejected and unconsciously drew on earlier traditions.

As in both earlier and concurrent incarnations, moreover, this emphasis on self-revelation brought with it both the threat of self-indulgence and a particular gender politics. Here, letting go of so-called "hang-ups" was often equated with liberation. In an interview given circa 1975, for example, Group members reminisced about a moment during the development of their third production, *Commune*, when cast member Patricia Bower wanted to quit. "She didn't know if what we were doing was some kind of therapy or something," remembered castmate Spalding Gray. This conflict, he recalled, actually made its way into the production:

She [Bower] really made a run for the door one day. I was angry that she was copping out, and I reached out and pulled open her shirt because I knew that she was up-tight about being flat chested. I did it to hurt and humiliate her because I was honestly hurt and angry at her myself. But, I was able to express that, where in "real life" I might not, because always in the back of my head I considered that my actions were made in order to make a play. It was a strong real reaction of mine to Patricia, and we ended up using it in the play when we taunted and humiliated Lara.

In other words, the ends (creation of art) justified the means (sexual humiliation of a castmate). Bower's reluctance to reveal too much of herself was punished with an even more unwelcome and violent revelation. According to Group member Steve Borst, "that image of Patricia having her blouse ripped open, really bothered her and she didn't want

²¹ On Gorelik and Lawson, see Saverio Giovacchini, *Hollywood Modernism: Film and Politics in the Age of the New Deal* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 130-32.

it used in the play. But, somehow she was rough-shodded over.” Borst, on the other hand, claimed to “[enjoy] exposing my personal pain...I wanted the most humiliating things that happened to me, public, and on the stage.” Bower herself was not present for this interview, and thus her own perspective on the incident has been lost from the historical record.

Not until *Commune* began to receive mixed reviews did members realize that this intense focus on self-revelation was conducive neither to emotional health nor, much to their chagrin, compelling theatre. As Spalding Gray noted, “there's a very fine line between consciously confessing and exposing yourself and being exploited in your vulnerability. Some of us thought that we had been pushed over that line.” Five years after the fact, he was unaware of his own exploitation of others or of the gendered power relations inherent in his literal stripping away of Bower’s protection. Joan MacIntosh, at that point married to Schechner, showed a greater self-awareness. She said, “we were trying to bring our personal lives into the space and reacting to 'old-time' theatre where people get up and pretend to be someone else. We always ran the risk of being self-indulgent. I agree that sometimes we went over the edge and did become self-indulgent. We made a lot of statements that were so ultra-personal that although it meant alot [sic] to the performer who was stating it, it meant nothing to an audience member.” One such “ultra-personal” sequence that MacIntosh may have come to regret was a scene in *Commune* in which the character she developed, Clementine, described in detail the paralyzing body image issues from which she suffered.²²

For women, then, the demand that one strip away, sometimes literally, all of the inauthentic armor that kept one’s true self hidden was a requirement fraught with the

²² Interview, undated [circa 1975], folder 165.13, Richard Schechner Papers.

potential for humiliation, pain, and embarrassment. To Richard Schechner and his male colleagues, as to many New Left men—both groups who considered themselves liberated in terms of gender and sexuality—women’s reluctance to embrace literal and psychic nakedness was a hang-up, evidence of their perceived inauthenticity. As in Method acting, women’s desire to protect themselves from exploitation was fundamentally at odds with an aesthetic sensibility dependent on self-revelation. The men involved in these pursuits, however, were blind to this dilemma. Schechner himself felt no qualms in pronouncing theatre an inherently masculine pursuit, going so far as to argue that “the imagination of the adolescent boy is the core of theater. It is the celebration of his achieving the status of manhood that is the status of theater.”²³

Deeply interested in anthropology, Schechner’s belief in the greater authenticity of “primitive” people’s art often plunged him into racial romanticism. The problem, as he saw it, was that in western, industrialized societies, art and life were separate; people took breaks from their lives to attend the theatre. What Schechner hoped to recreate in his productions was the “savage” art of “primitive” peoples, which he believed retained a closer connection to their “real lives.” A favorite and frequent example of the ritual art Schechner hoped to emulate was that performed by the Orocolo, a tribe in New Guinea who performed a ritual cycle play that lasted between six and twenty years and was so

²³ Richard Schechner quoted in Shannon Jackson, *Professing Performance: Theatre in the Academy from Philology to Performativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 169. Interestingly, as Martin Puchner points out, other members of The Performance Group often accused Schechner of privileging theory over the the creative process of the actor. Further research will be needed to determine the extent to which this conflict paralleled the SDS debate between program and experience. Another possible point of connection between the two organizations was the relationship between Schechner and Elizabeth LeCompte, who joined the Group during its second production and would go on to be a founding member of the Wooster Group, The Performance Group’s successor. As Mike Vanden Heuvel points out, LeCompte “increasingly became disaffected by Schechner’s focus on a ritualized environmental design and his use of group therapy and other psychoanalytical methods to develop actor training in ever more vulnerable and cathartic directions.” In her own work with the Wooster Group, she “distanced herself from her roles with elaborate masks, wigs, makeup, and other task-oriented acting preparations.” See Pucher, 314-15; Vanden Heuvel, 340.

deeply ingrained in the lives of the people that it did not matter if they did not live long enough to see it performed in order.²⁴ Schechner's attempts to break down the boundaries between theatre and life were based upon the desire to reclaim a more authentic, more "savage" art. "The contradictions between our way of life and theirs vanishes when art is the mediator," he wrote, "The art of nonliterate peoples is at the center of our own experience...our art, like theirs, is 'savage.'"²⁵ Although he was self-aware enough to put quotation marks around such terms as "savage" and "primitive," an undercurrent of privileged appropriation still ran through Schechner's professed desire to counter the alienation manifest in art's separation from everyday life with the use-value tribal societies placed on ritual.²⁶ As noted in chapter six, the 1960s emphasis on authenticity also took place against the backdrop of an international outcry against the "masking" colonialism forced on native peoples, alienating them from their true selves. White radicals including Schechner and many SDS members appropriated this critique and applied it to themselves.

For my purposes, the most interesting aspect of experimental theatre lay in its attempts to blur the boundaries between performers and audience members, what Schechner called "the dissolution of the audience-spectator dichotomy."²⁷ As Schechner and his colleagues broadened the category of performance (and performer), they engendered heated debates about the nature of the audience: were they to be passive,

²⁴ See, for example, Richard Schecher, "Six Axioms for Environmental Theatre," in Schechner, *Public Domain: Essays on the Theatre* (New York: Avon, 1969), 176. The piece was written in 1968.

²⁵ Richard Schecher, "Approaches: Works-in-Progress," in Schechner, *Public Domain: Essays on the Theatre* (New York: Avon, 1969), 71-3. Schechner worked on this piece between 1965-6 and in 1968.

²⁶ See Pucher, 327.

²⁷ Richard Schechner, "Happenings," in Schechner, *Public Domain: Essays on the Theatre* (New York: Avon, 1969), 160. The piece was written between 1965 and 1968.

compliant witnesses, or were they themselves to be a part of the production? Advocates of the former view held that breaking down distinctions between audience members and performers threatened law and order and ushered in an era of democracy run amok, while those who hewed to the latter position argued that it was immoral for the minority (performers) to make decisions for the majority (audience members).

These positions will no doubt sound familiar to students of the 1960s, as well they should. The Performance Group, founded in 1967, was never far removed from American politics, beginning with its first production, *Dionysus in 69*, which ran in a small garage on Wooster Street in New York City from June 6, 1968, to July 7, 1969. The opening date coincided with the assassination of Bobby Kennedy, and the remainder of the run, which was concurrent with the violence at the Democratic National Convention in August and the rancor of the presidential election in November, would be no less eventful. To a certain extent the production, which grew and changed throughout the run, responded to these changes; even more importantly, both sympathetic and unsympathetic observers viewed *Dionysus* (and the Group's third play, *Commune*, which opened in New York City in December 1970, after a fall tour of university campuses) through this lens. *Dionysus* functioned as a litmus test and often as a trial of the left and the counterculture, with the verdict depending on the observer's political inclinations. It also, I argue, functioned as a microcosm of the national debates taking place surrounding the demographic that would soon be dubbed the silent majority. For those on both sides of this debate, performers were stand-ins for politicians, and audience members functioned as proxies for the American people. What appeared to be an aesthetic difference of opinion was really a debate about the proper role of citizens: should they sit

quietly and support the decisions of their leaders, the quality Richard Nixon found so laudable in the silent majority? Or should they raise their voices and demand to be a part of the action, as in the New Left vision of participatory democracy?

In general, Schechner found the political protest movements of the 1960s to be a useful model for what he hoped performance could become. Schechner conceived of performances as located on various points of a spectrum that went from “life” to “art,” with “public events” and “demonstrations” at one end of the spectrum and “traditional theatre” at the other. In between lay “intermedia,” “happenings,” and “environmental theatre.” The goal was to create art that more accurately captured the essence of life, particularly the slippage between audience and performer and a “plot” (using the term as loosely as possible) that did not follow a conventional narrative structure but rather comprised a series of confrontations that produced no definitive resolutions. As Schechner put it, “confrontation is what makes current American political activity theatrical.” Theatrical practitioners, it followed, would do well to emulate this heightened reality, in which “meet[ing] Bull Connor’s dogs in Birmingham or LBJ’s troops at the Pentagon is more than a showdown in the Wild West tradition.²⁸ In the movies, everything would be settled by the showdown. In our politics, contrasts are heightened, nothing resolved. A long series of confrontations are necessary to promote change.” Schechner’s second allusion, the 1967 anti-war march on Washington, D.C., was one of his favorite and most oft-cited examples of what a performance should be, particularly for its “shifting groups of performers and spectators.” As he put it,

²⁸ The police chief in Birmingham, Alabama, infamous for setting police dogs on peaceful civil rights protestors. Widely televised, these events garnered a great deal of northern sympathy for the civil rights movement, prompting President John F. Kennedy to quip that Connor had done more for the movement than any other individual in 1963.

The demonstrators had broken through the military lines and were sitting-in on the Pentagon parking lot. Those in the front lines sat against the row of troops, and frequent small actions—nudging, exchange of conversation—turned these front lines into focal points. Every half-hour or so, both the front line troops and the demonstrators were rotated. Demonstrators who were watching the action suddenly became part of it; the same for the troops. Elements of the Pentagon leadership stood on the steps in front of the main entrance, watching the procedure. For someone at home, the entire confrontation was a performance, and everyone—from [Secretary of Defense Robert] McNamara at his window to the ad-hoc demonstration leaders with their bullhorns—was acting according to role.²⁹

Admittedly, Schechner's understanding of the relationship between role-playing and authenticity was not always internally consistent, but at least in this instance, "acting according to role" was not inauthentic. As Schechner saw it, art became more authentic when it—like life—blurred the participant lines between performer/audience and the temporal lines between performing/not performing. Young radicals, Schechner felt, thoroughly if unselfconsciously trained in methods of demonstrative performance, were far better prepared to deal with these blurred boundaries than were artists. What was "putting our bodies on the line" if not the fullest expression of Schechner's (via Polish director Jerzy Grotowski's) insistence on physical commitment, even at times to the point of bodily harm?³⁰ Ironically, political activists provided Schechner with a model of authenticity precisely because they were always performing.

Accordingly, Schechner sought to develop theatrical forms that responded, as he saw social and political movements doing, to the "generalized *yearnings* felt by many individuals in industrialized societies." His description of these yearnings reads as a

²⁹ Richard Schechner, "Six Axioms for Environmental Theatre," in Schechner, *Public Domain: Essays on the Theatre* (New York: Avon, 1969), 167-72. The piece was written in 1968.

³⁰ In one particularly evocative (and troubling) example, Schechner told a story of an exercise in which a female performer was injured at the hands of a male performer as an example of a time "we have come close...to those life-experience roots that we share with other cultures." Richard Schechner, "The Politics of Ecstasy," in Schechner, *Public Domain: Essays on the Theatre* (New York: Avon, 1969), 232-7. The piece was written in 1968.

litany of New Left goals. Both experimental theatre and 1960s social/political movements, Schechner noted, derived from desires not only for participatory democracy, but also for “jobs like play...an end to the assembly line where a person does not do a ‘whole thing’ but is fragmented and turned into a machine,” the ability to “turn people into artists not onto art,” and rejections of “theories, abstractions, generalizations” and “artificial smoothness and conformity.”³¹

If by 1973 Schechner’s assessment of what the New Left had *accomplished* in pursuit of these goals was less than sanguine, such failures ironically served only to heighten their usefulness as a performative model. “Theater takes a pivotal position in these movements,” he wrote, “because the movements are histrionic: a way of focusing attention and demanding change. The marches, demonstrations, street and guerilla theaters, arrests of well-known and unknown people were for show: symbolic gestures.”³² Schechner saw “the great actions of the late sixties” undertaken by white radicals as symbolic because, in contrast to the genuinely revolutionary stances of the Black Panthers, Cuba’s Castro, or China’s Mao, “the proclaimed stakes were way out of line with the actual stakes”; white radicals, in his view, were too protected by their race and class to engage in anything but “rehearsal.” “One of the great differences between the white liberal-radical movements and the black revolutionary movements,” he argued, “is that underneath the black talk is actuality, not symbolism...In the black experience there is a basis for genuine revolution; in the white experience there is a basis for symbolic or hoped-for revolution.” Where white radicals were concerned,

³¹ Richard Schechner, “Therapy,” in Schechner, *Environmental Theater* (New York: Applause, 1973), 196-7.

³² *Ibid.* 197.

Ultimately, each demonstration was exactly that: a way of showing, not a way of doing; to 'seize' a building did not mean to actually engage in the kind of insurrection practiced by Mao or Castro; rather the American actions were gestures, rehearsals, theater pieces designed to show what could happen, or what the protestors somewhere felt deeply ambivalent about. Each symbolic act was a kind of kidnapping of conscience to be held in jeopardy until a ransom of action was paid: ending the War in Vietnam, sharing the governance of the universities with students, and so on. The goal was not to overthrow the system, or even the government, but to make the system respond.³³

Interestingly, by comparing the authenticity of white radicals unfavorably to that of marginalized Americans and third-world revolutionaries, Schechner unconsciously parroted white New Leftists' own views. Even more interesting, in the context of heightened *political* performativity, theatre, in Schechner's view, became even more real. Because he believed that theatre was to serve a symbolic, ritualistic purpose, symbolic, ritualistic actions were perfect models to emulate. If New Left actions were rehearsals, rehearsals were precisely what was needed to combat the political status quo and spur citizens to action.³⁴

The more specific connection I draw between performance theory and participatory democracy is no mere historian's conceit but rather was an integral and explicit aspect of Richard Schechner's ideas about the proper relationship between performers and audience members. According to Schechner himself, he began developing these theories almost ten years before the premiere of *Dionysus in 69*. Moving south when he was drafted in 1958, the director lived in New Orleans from 1960 until 1967. His arrival in that city coincided with riots that erupted when the school board attempted to implement a plan for desegregating local schools, a long six years

³³ Ibid., 198.

³⁴ Ibid., 198-200.

after *Brown v. Board* and four years after being ordered to do so by a Federal District Court judge. As Schechner, an ardent supporter of integration, related the tale in 1973,

I got involved, and committed to the ethos of participatory democracy. Participatory democracy is clumsy, inefficient, often stupid, and very frustrating to a person who sees the “right way” and wants to “get it done.” But participatory democracy is a beautiful method of getting people to relate to each other on the basis of mutual desires, and of learning about power: how to get it, use it, abuse it. Over the years 1960-1963 I fused participatory democracy, New Orleans street life, and my own developing ideas about what theater could be.³⁵

Eventually, these ideas would coalesce into a theory that attempted to break down divisions between performers and audience members. Audience participation, Schechner argued, “break[s] the monopoly performers and directors hold over the meaning of the production, particularly a monopoly on knowing what is going to happen next...when a spectator, or a group of spectators, makes a move, the performers ought to fall back, give over the space to the spectators: Let the majority rule.” Adhering to these practices would “[shatter] the authoritarian fix of orthodox theater.”³⁶ In *Dionysus*, for example, audience “participation...was according to the democratic model: letting people into the play to do as the performers were doing, to ‘join the story.’”³⁷ In *Commune*, participation was intended to give “performers and spectators...the chance to meet on equal terms.” It was “a way of trying to humanize relationships between performers and spectators.”³⁸

³⁵ Richard Schechner, “Participation,” in Schechner, *Environmental Theater* (New York: Applause, 1973), 66.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 83-4.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 44.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 60. Interestingly, Schechner did not seem to have any interest in applying these ideas to The Performance Group itself, instead maintaining his own autocratic rule. As Martin Pucher points out, after the failure of *Makbeth*, the Group’s second production, Schechner “posted a text on the door of the Performing Garage stating his claim to almost absolute authority and spelling out the decisions he would reserve for himself.” Pucher, 322.

The connection to the silent majority is admittedly less explicit, though no less remarkable. As defined by Richard Nixon in 1969, silent majority members were those Americans who, unlike the noisy anti-war protestors, respected the wisdom and authority of the country's leaders and still made up the bulk of its population. Of course, members of this demographic were anything but silent (at times to the chagrin of Nixon and other political leaders), but nor, truly, was a good audience. Silent majority members were, however, self-identified rules followers, people who were willing to restrict their participation in the country's political life to carefully prescribed roles; like a good audience, they applauded and booed (voted, protested, or walked out of the performance altogether by fleeing from the cities to the suburbs), but they expressed no desire to do away with the hierarchical political system itself. Moreover, they resented the attempts they saw others—perceived rules-breakers—making to bring about a more equitable political and social system. This was the attitude Carl Oglesby encountered during a visit to his family in South Carolina after his father's death, which coincided with Nixon's 1970 expansion of the Vietnam War into Cambodia and student deaths at Kent State University and Jackson State College at the hands of National Guard members and police officers, respectively. By that point a well-known veteran of the anti-war movement, Oglesby found himself struggling to defend his support of Vietnamese self-determination to his extended family, members of which accused him of harboring anti-American and communist sympathies. "How in the world can ordinary people like me and you claim to know better than our elected government officials which side is right over yonder?," his uncle challenged, "If the president says we've got to do this thing, all right, then, by the Lord God Almighty, we've got to do it!"³⁹

³⁹ Carl Oglesby, *Ravens in the Storm: A Personal History of the 1960s Antiwar Movement* (New York:

These competing positions would play a key role in both the production and the reception of *Dionysus in 69*. The story of *The Bacchae* had already been on Richard Schechner's mind for several years when he first attempted to adapt it in early 1962. Although a relatively peaceful moment by the decade's standards, he realized even then that there were clear “analogies between the Dionysian ecstasy” of the play “and the politics of our own day. We have seen crowds in our streets, and heard the marching of soldiers.”⁴⁰ Although his hopes for adapting and producing the play would not be realized until six years later, he spent the intervening years writing several essays discussing *The Bacchae*, most notably “The Politics of Ecstasy,” which echoed Erich Fromm in arguing that people unprepared for freedom could easily fall prey to fascism.⁴¹

The Performance Group began work on what would become *Dionysus in 69* in January 1968. Of the forty-eight people who had attended a preliminary workshop in November, thirty remained; by opening night in June, the company would consist of thirteen members. In March they began renting the garage on Wooster Street that would become their home. Conceived of as a collective enterprise from the beginning—*Dionysus* would credit no author other than the Group—the play developed from William Arrowsmith's translation of Euripides's *Bacchae*, group improvisations, and lines prepared by individual group members either at home or during rehearsal. As Schechner put it, “the root of that work was exploration. And exploration, as we understood it then, meant exchange. We exchanged touches, places, ideas, anxieties, words, gestures,

Scribner, 2008), 308.

⁴⁰ Richard Schechner, Notes for the Production of *Young King, Jealous God*, January 3, 1962, folder 157.6, Richard Schechner Papers.

⁴¹ Richard Schechner, “The Politics of Ecstasy,” in Schechner, *Public Domain: Essays on the Theatre* (New York: Avon, 1969), 238. The piece was written in 1968.

hostilities, rages, smells, glances, sounds, loves.” Ultimately, *Dionysus* used 600 of the 1300 lines in Arrowsmith's translation, along with a smattering of lines from *Antigone* and *Hippolytus*. Beyond that, each performer developed her or his character's dialogue, which was then presented in a montage of overlapping voices, rhythms, and movements. According to Schechner, “I wanted as much personal expression as possible in a play that deals so effectively with the liberation of personal energy.”⁴²

The Performance Group's re-imagining of *The Bacchae* focused, as did the original, on the power struggle between the young King Pentheus and his cousin, the god Dionysus. Pentheus, who values law and order above all else, does not want his people worshipping Dionysus, who celebrates joy and freedom. Enthralled by this message, the people soon turn against Pentheus. Dionysus, however, quickly turns out to be merely another dictator, intent on bending the will of the people to suit his own needs. The action culminates with the brutal murder, at Dionysus's behest, of Pentheus by his own mother, Agave, and several other women. Dionysus then lays a curse on the people, who originally doubted that he was a god.⁴³

Here, though, similarities to the original ceased. Even before the play began, audience members realized the evening would be an unconventional experience. Rather than entering the theatre with friends, members of the public were allowed in only one at a time. “This is a rite of initiation,” noted stage manager Vicki May Strang, “a chance for each person to confront the environment alone, without comparing notes with friends.” Once inside, audience members would realize that there was no delineation between

⁴² The Performance Group, *Dionysus in 69*, ed. Richard Schechner (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1970).

⁴³ Ibid.

stage and seating; rather, they chose seats anywhere in the “environment”—on the floor, on top of columns or rocks, under the shade of trees. As audience members entered, performers had already begun to engage in warm-up exercises for their voices and bodies. The integration of the audience into the performance did not end there; in what would become a trademark of The Performance Group (and much avant-garde theatre from the 1960s onward), audience members would be invited to take part in the revelry or even be groped by the blindfolded performer playing the seer Tiresias.⁴⁴ According to Schechner, audience members sometimes even spontaneously stripped to join the play; once, a group of college students attending the play kidnapped Pentheus to prevent his murder. “I was elated that something ‘real’ had happened,” the director later wrote, citing audience participation as the catalyst for “those points where the play stopped being a play and became a social event—when spectators felt that they were free to enter the performance as equals.”⁴⁵ A happy by-product of audience participation was the resistance it provided against “mechanized theater,” in which performances grew stale and repetitive and dramatic outcomes were “a mechanical inevitability.”⁴⁶

The Performance Group clearly intended *Dionysus* to be a political parable of late-1960s strife, a warning against the twin temptations of authoritarianism and self-indulgent liberation. The play argued that blindly following charismatic leaders, no matter what they promised, would lead to destruction. In this way, members of TPG used *Dionysus* to draw a clear line between authentic self-expression and the blind pursuit of pleasure, which reduced individuals to a mass incapable of standing up to totalitarianism.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Schechner, “Participation,” 40-44.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 79.

One of the ways TPG members attempted to keep these concerns in the forefront of audience members' minds was through a constant blurring between the play and real life.⁴⁷ First, performers alternated between referring to others by their characters' names and their real names, inviting confusion about who, exactly, was speaking. When, after being "born" by traveling through a birth canal formed by the naked bodies of several cast members, Dionysus first appeared, the performer playing him (the cast rotated frequently) would introduce facts from her or his own life. At one point, Dionysus joked that he was wearing glasses only because he was holding them for the actor playing him, William Finley. More explicitly, the play included clear allusions to modern-day figures, events, and issues. Even before Dionysus's appearance, for example, Tiresias scoffed at the "customs and traditions hallowed by age and handed down by our fathers" that would prohibit a man of his age from dancing: "Did the god say that just the young should dance?" he asked, "Or just the old? Or just the whites? Or just the blacks? Or just the Italians? Or just the Greeks? Or just James Brown? No, he wants his honor from all mankind. He wants no one excluded from his worship. Not even The Performance Group."⁴⁸

Pentheus, meanwhile, was a clear analogue for Richard Nixon (although some commentators, as will be discussed below, imagined him as a stand-in for the current president, Lyndon B. Johnson), who was then waging a campaign against the lack of respect for order he saw in the anti-war movement. Trying in vain to halt the celebrations that had intensified after Dionysus's arrival, Pentheus inveighed against the lack of order he saw around him. "He who crosses the law, or tries to bring the rulers under him," he

⁴⁷ See Pucher, 325.

⁴⁸ The Performance Group, *Dionysus in 69*.

pontificated, “shall never have a word of praise from me. The man the state has put in place must have obedient hearing to his least command when it is right and even when it is not.” For his insistence that leaders be followed even when they were wrong, Pentheus received a harsh rebuke from Tiresias. “Do not be so sure,” he warned the king, “that power is what matters in the life of man; do not mistake for wisdom the fantasies of your sick mind.”⁴⁹

According to Patrick McDermott, who originated the role of Tiresias and remained in the part until March 1969, this exchange was intended to resonate with the debate over the war. “When I spoke these words,” he explained,

I enacted Beck, Chomsky, Arden, Laing, Brown, even Faulkner—and all the modern prophets who have seen that slave revolts are rational acts but wars of nationhood are not, who have called for new definitions of madness and sanity, and who have not been afraid to diagnose the insanity of those most rational of men, the managerial warmakers. Especially I enacted the Harvard biologist George Wald, who said, “That was a United States Senator holding...a patriotic speech. Well, here is a Nobel laureate who thinks that those words are criminally insane.”⁵⁰

Beginning on March 4, 1969, Wald had given a series of speeches criticizing the U.S. government's “[preoccupation] with death, with the business of killing and being killed” in Vietnam.” The words he singled out as “criminally insane” came from Georgia Senator Richard B. Russell, who had argued that, should civilization need to be rebuilt in the wake of a nuclear holocaust, it should begin with a new Adam and Eve who were Americans.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ George Wald quoted in Israel Shenker, “Quiet Harvard Man Emerges to Speak out for Humanity,” *The New York Times*, April 27, 1969, p. 61.

The tension between Pentheus and Dionysus escalated quickly, with Pentheus threatening to cut off Dionysus's hair, castrate him, and throw him in prison. Clearly, though, public sentiment did not lie with Pentheus, for his people saw in the charismatic, freedom-promising Dionysus a form of deliverance from their leader's autocratic rule. Dionysus declared that Pentheus would be killed, and the people cheered.⁵²

Then, a Messenger entered to address the audience directly, describing the ensuing death struggle between Dionysus and Pentheus as “the organism versus the law”—a living, breathing creature against a static, top-down system of restrictions. Each performer who played the Messenger gave a different version of the speech, but they all had the same message: people too caught up in the pursuit of “freedom” would quickly find the movement out of their control; self-liberation would soon become amoral anarchy. When Patrick McDermott, one of the Group's most political members, played the part, the speech went as follows:

What happens is this: There are certain pig-like features about a policeman. So someone beats up an oink-pig, a thing alive, a thing with sense and feeling, in order to express his sentiments. What happens is someone rapes a girl in Central Park to get that warm, wet, wild, free feeling inside. What happens is, at a theatre or a football game, someone starts something like this.

At this point in the speech, the performer playing the Messenger would begin snapping her or his fingers—inviting the audience to join in—faster and faster until the movement spiraled out of control and eventually died. The Messenger continued,

...who knows the beat of liberation? Who knows the pulse of his own life? What happens is that Dionysus, according to his convenience and popular demand, becomes another Pentheus. Most of us have a pretty cheap fantasy of self-liberation. And if Dionysus, or someone else, could lead us into the Promised

⁵² The Performance Group, *Dionysus in 69*.

Land, then Dionysus, or someone else, could lead us right out again. Don't bother to get The Man unless you plan to close his office down, permanently.⁵³

What started out as revolutionary could easily become reactionary, and “freedom” could quickly devolve into the selfish pursuit of one's own interests and even the exploitation of other people. McDermott noted that audience members would generally cheer on the murder of the tyrant Pentheus until they realized the unintended consequences of such “liberation.”⁵⁴

If the Messenger's speech implied that audience members still had a choice to accept or decline empty promises of liberation emanating from charismatic, but incipiently tyrannical, leaders, the people of Thebes were already too deeply in Dionysus's thrall to reverse the process. As Jason Bousseau's version of the Messenger speech noted, Dionysus was no longer content with the people's voluntary support; instead, “for the good of all people,” he would “assume absolute ownership of the collective will of the people.” Once secured, Dionysus used this control to order Agave (Pentheus's mother) and the other women to murder the king.⁵⁵

Dionysus's cruelest measure lay yet in the future, however. Despite the support he eventually won from them, the people of Thebes had initially doubted Dionysus's godliness, and for that, he determined, they must be punished. With the several different versions of Dionysus's curse delivered at the end of the play, the slippage between performer and character, members of the audience and people of Thebes, and America in 1968 and *Dionysus in 69* was complete. In more than one version of the curse, cast

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

members were condemned to futures upholding the ugliest elements of American society. Jason Bousseau's Dionysus, for example, cursed William Shephard/Cadmus (a contemporary of Tiresias's) to "lead thousands and millions of troops through this country and make it pure again...You will have your men stick bayonets in the bellies of each citizen who does not believe in America." Similarly, Joan MacIntosh's Dionysus condemned William Finley/Cadmus to "change your name to General Curtis LeMay...You will lead an army group into Vietnam and kill all the Americans and Vietnamese. On your way back home you will destroy all the major cities in the world. You will bomb your world back to the Stone Age, where it belongs." LeMay, George Wallace's running mate in 1968, was notorious for his 1965 statements that North Vietnam should be bombed "back into the Stone Age." The message was clear: those who blindly followed their leaders were doomed to perpetuate ugly American imperialism. McDermott's Dionysus, meanwhile, cursed people to be so endlessly entertained that they would be too complacent to think of challenging their leaders.⁵⁶

The most interesting (because it directly implicated the theatrical audience) version of the curse was actually the first one ever performed. In this variation, used prior to the 1968 election, William Finley played Dionysus, who appeared in the guise of a respectable politician, hair neatly combed, dressed in a blue suit and tie, and carrying a bag that resembled the American flag and contained buttons bearing the slogan "Dionysus in '69." Meting out specific punishments to several of the performers (whom he called by their real names), Dionysus/William Finley condemned the rest of the people to cast votes for him in the upcoming presidential election, with the promise (or threat) that "a vote for Finley in 68 brings Dionysus in 69." He threw his buttons out to the

⁵⁶ Ibid.

audience and, carried on the shoulders of his fellow performers, exited the theatre. Those audience members who followed him onto Wooster Street heard exhortations to manifest their “liberation” by violating every code of social decency. “I love the smell of riots, the orgasms of death and blood!” he yelled as the procession marched toward Broome Street.⁵⁷

As Richard Schechner pointed out, Finley/Dionysus's campaign buttons functioned as a test of the audience—a test they generally failed. “When Dionysus throws his buttons down to the spectators,” Schechner later commented,

many scramble for them as if a button were a gold coin, so strong is the habit and hold of acquisitiveness. I sit smug and detached, and watch a double scene of genuine horror and poignancy. Here, Dionysus turned tyrant and fascist. There, spectators jostling each other for a cheap (but free) souvenir. Their behavior means they have not understood the play. Instead, they participate in it with the same unthinking power with which they validate their congressmen, bosses, priests, and presidents. The people deceive and betray themselves even as they listen to a warning against deception and betrayal.⁵⁸

Utterly brainwashed by proximity to power and incapable of thinking for themselves, the American people, it appeared to Schechner, were doomed to repeat the mistakes of Thebes.

With its equal condemnation of authoritarianism and hedonistic abandon, *Dionysus in 69* offered few solutions and little solace to those hoping to heal a polarized America. Reviewers did not hesitate to graft the story of Pentheus and Dionysus onto the conflicts between Lyndon B. Johnson and SDS, the managerial liberals and the student left, the establishment and the counterculture. The same was true of the Group's third production (after *Dionysus* and *Makbeth*, a Shakespeare adaptation), *Commune*, which

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

was developed during a summer 1970 residency at the State University of New York at New Paltz. The company took *Commune* on a university tour in the fall and opened in New York City in December. Less narrative than *Dionysus*, *Commune* mixed in stories about family, non-conformity, body image, the life of a performer, and participation in The Performance Group with satirical critiques of aspects of American society and culture, for example, the My Lai massacre, religious fundamentalism, and the murder of Sharon Tate. In developing the production, Group members drew on, among other sources, the Bible, Shakespeare, Herman Melville, radio broadcasts of revival meetings, interviews with members of the Manson family, and their own life histories.⁵⁹ The program described the play as “an attempt to get inside the past, present and future of the Utopian dream of Americans.”⁶⁰ Schechner, in more expansive fashion, noted that *Commune*'s “basic real themes” included “hypocrisy vs truth; myth/lies vs actual...false/gesture vs actual, concrete contact...[and] finished/polished vs process/exercises,” dichotomies that, with their emphasis on authenticity, would have resonated with SDS members’ attempts to undo their years of social training and express the true selves buried underneath.⁶¹ *Commune*, moreover, aimed (as did the Group more broadly) at capturing that most idealistic of syntheses: the free, authentic expression of individuality within a collective. “In community,” wrote Schechner, “is the hope of the people.”⁶² “When a group of people” such as The Performance Group “work together a long time they develop a model of the collective spirit. Each person in the group finds

⁵⁹ Editor's Note, undated [1970], folder 165.14, Richard Schechner Papers.

⁶⁰ Program, *Commune*, 1970, folder 165.10, Richard Schechner Papers.

⁶¹ Richard Schechner, Notebook, June 21, 1970, folder 165.14, Richard Schechner Papers.

⁶² Richard Schechner, Notebook, January 31, 1970.

his 'symbolic displacements' and they relate organically to each other. It is an artificial but authentic collective.”⁶³

Commune was a living production, and thus it grew and changed over time; the extant script dates from the summer of 1971 but should not be considered definitive. Even this script, for example, contained multiple versions of the My Lai sequence, the single most important scene in the play. On March 16, 1968, U.S. soldiers attacked the South Vietnamese village of My Lai, killing anywhere between 350-500 unarmed residents, all of them noncombatants, many of them women, infants, children, and elderly people. The Performance Group's treatment of the massacre featured a character named David, a soldier, attempting to justify his participation in the massacre to the character played by cast member Spalding Gray. “Well,” explained David matter-of-factly, “we gather 15 people in the center of the village, and we place them in there, and it's like a little island, I'd say, right there in the center of the village.” David's demeanor did not change when he confirmed Spalding's suspicion that some of these people were infants. He then described with a chilling lack of affect shooting this group, answering Spalding's inquiry as to how many times he shot them: “Well, I fire them on automatic, so you can't—you just spray / the / whole / area / on them / so you can't know how many you kill because they're going down so fast.” Even killing infants did not trouble David; as he repeated several times, “It's just one of them things. It seemed like it was the natural thing to do at the time.” Use of the colloquial “them things” also distanced the elite, educated, likely northern performer from the less-well-educated, probably southern character. The effect, whether intentional or not, was placing the blame for the massacre squarely on the back of the working class.

⁶³ Richard Schechner, Notebook, April 7, 1970.

What made *Commune's* re-enactment of the My Lai massacre so noteworthy was that audience members were not merely sitting in their seats and watching the action unfold. Instead, as the scene began, Spalding asked audience members to come to the center of the space to represent the villagers of My Lai. Then, as the scene continued, it was the audience members whose deaths David would simulate. In an alternate version, a cast member would choose fifteen audience members at random to represent the villagers. Occasionally, audience members were asked to play the part of the perpetrators. Those chosen could either acquiesce, convince another audience member to take her or his place, or leave the theatre entirely. That The Performance Group intended this as an indictment of the war and its concomitant, coldhearted disregard for non-American lives seems clear. What is interesting is that Group members believed that it was not enough for audience members to witness these atrocities, as it would have been for Brecht or Tennessee Williams. Rather, they had to participate in them themselves. Once audience members experienced these events, Group members believed, they could not help but oppose the war.

The insistence on audience participation was one of two key themes on which both positive and negative reviews of *Dionysus in 69* and *Commune* focused. Clive Barnes of the *New York Times*, for example, hailed *Dionysus's* attempts “to involve the audience in a new participant fashion,” while his colleague Walter Kerr felt violated.⁶⁴ The other, not unrelated, theme was a connection between The Performance Group and both the anti-war left and the counterculture. This distinction, although at times fuzzy in

⁶⁴ Clive Barnes, “Theater: Development of the Environmental Experience and Audience Involvement...,” *New York Times*, November 19, 1968, folder 173.1, Richard Schechner Papers; Walter Kerr, “Come Dance with Me.’ ‘Who, Me?,” *New York Times*, June 16, 1968, folder 173.1, Richard Schechner Papers.

the minds of reviewers, was a point of salience to Schechner and his colleagues. Indeed, Group members took steps to dissociate themselves from the counterculture, which they saw as escapist, a false panacea for troubling times. More sympathetic to the politically active anti-war left, they nonetheless mounted a separate skit that gently mocked the heady, intellectual banter of young politicians. In two overlapping conversations, characters Adele and Arlene discuss personal relationships, while Joe and Eddie discuss non-narrative poetry as an avoidance of politics, Godard, intellect versus embodiment, the “controllism” of corporate liberalism, and the relationship between capitalism and nationalism. “But,” Joe says in a wink to the audience, “would anybody be interested in hearing this conversation we’re having?” Eddie responds, “That’s a that’s a [*sic*] real tough—just as far as energy from the stage.”⁶⁵ Incapable of embracing the largely apolitical nature of the counterculture, Group members saw more potential in, but were also ambivalent about, the left’s ability to develop effective politics *or* provide fodder for compelling theatre (to be discussed in more depth below). Much to the cast’s chagrin, however, reviewers did not see this ambiguity in the two longer plays, pasting onto the Group’s aesthetics issues of citizenship ripped from headlines about Vietnam and the perceived erosion of respect for authority. While certainly these issues were there, the plays did not intend to offer the easy solutions critics often saw. In this way, *Dionysus* and *Commune* became referenda on the left’s vision for the role of the citizen *vis-à-vis* the country’s established political leadership.

Critics of competing political stripes seemed to agree about one thing: *Dionysus* and *Commune* condemned the establishment and celebrated the counterculture and/or anti-war left. However, only positive reviews sensed the ambiguity for which the Group

⁶⁵ Unnamed skit, undated, folder 157.8, Richard Schechner Papers.

stroke. For example, Ernest J. Schwartz of the Studio Lab Theatre noted that *Dionysus* was as much about the foolishness of a “point of view in which one man's individuality is to be cherished over any sense of community” as it was about the disastrous results of blind obedience to authority.⁶⁶ Negative reviews, by contrast, saw the play as an uncomplicated endorsement of unfettered personal freedom. In both cases, however, critics read their own feelings about the political upheavals of the 1960s onto the Group's productions.

In this regard, Robert Brustein's review in the *New Republic*, evocatively titled “The Democratization of Art,” was exemplary. Irritated by the play's focus on self-expression, he noted that “we are exposed to quite a bit of group therapy...Most of the time...The Performing Group [*sic*] is merely indulging private moments, revealing lives of considerably less significance than one has a right to demand in the theatre.” However, neither self-indulgence nor the play's perceived obsession with sex constituted the biggest offense in Brustein's estimation. Rather, these tendencies were merely symptomatic of a larger problem: the breakdown of authority in theatre, which in turn was a reflection of the breakdown of authority in politics. Taking literally Dionysus's call to “freedom—not bullshit freedom but real freedom...This might mean burning down slums and listening to the screams...Freedom from responsibility—get guns,” Brustein saw the play as “the inevitable consequence of a culture where everybody is encouraged to do his own thing, and excellence gives way before permissiveness.” Borrowing from British playwright John Osborne, Brustein called this “democracy gone mad,” arguing that a system in which each person's input was considered equally valid “could spell the

⁶⁶ Ernest J. Schwartz quoted in flier, *Dionysus in 69*, 1969, folder 173.1, Richard Schechner Papers. Schwartz had been involved in the development of the production.

end of history, literature, and tradition while banishing craft and inspiration from the arts.” The true crime of the play, then, was the cast's audacity in believing that their (and the audience's) voices were as important as the elites whose contributions had been vetted by the proper authorities. Brustein feared a future in which “there will be no more spectators, only performers” in much the same way political elites feared that the broader empowerment promised by participatory democracy would remove a pliable citizenry willing to follow its leaders. The critic would have much preferred that the audience remain a silent majority whose role was to witness, but not participate in or interfere with, the action.⁶⁷

Walter Kerr's largely negative review took a slightly different tack, arguing that the performers' manifest liberation was a form of control over the spectators, one that actually *restricted* the audience's ability to engage with the proceedings. His interpretation, however, still hewed to the view held by those who, later that summer, would criticize the protesters at the 1968 Democratic National Convention on the grounds that this vocal minority of young people was controlling the national discourse in a way that did not comport with the desires of the majority. “My problem,” Kerr began his review, “is that I'm not divine. You're divine, as all the freest new plays are telling us, only when you do what you want to do. And somehow or other I never get to do what I want to do in those playhouses—and now garages—where the actors are having a hell of a time doing what *they* want to do.” It is easy to see how “divine” could have functioned as a stand-in for liberation, for the do-your-own-thing unconventionality of the counterculture. In being forced to dance with the cast members, Kerr felt that he was

⁶⁷ Robert Brustein, “The Democratization of Art,” *New Republic*, August 10, 1968, folder 173.1, Richard Schechner Papers.

being kept from what he wanted to do: think. “It is only the actors who are liberated in this sort of meeting,” he wrote. They “are in control of the master plan. They are free to do what they wish to do. We are only free to do what *they* wish us to do or invite us to do. That is not engagement. It is surrender.” In this view, audience members' (or the majority of the citizenry's) desires were being held hostage by the radical demands of the performers (a conflation of the student left and the counterculture). Interestingly, Kerr's review came close to capturing the intended meaning of the play. “The only possible conclusion one can see,” he wrote, “is an implication that the very openness and abandon we have been encouraged to share all evening long are an openness and abandon that must inevitably end in violence”—precisely the message Schechner and his colleagues hoped to convey. Ultimately, though, Kerr was incapable of believing that the play was intended as anything other than a simple endorsement of Dionysian abandon, qualifying his earlier statement by wondering if “we [have] pressed our own minds too far.” The performers, by implication, must not have a larger political point beyond the embrace of pleasure.⁶⁸ He also, however, criticized what he perceived as *Dionysus's* condescension toward its audience; implicit in radical theatre's insistence on shattering illusions, he argued, was a belief that audiences were such gullible dupes that they needed to be constantly reminded that they were watching a play.⁶⁹ The relationship between performers and audience members was in his view a hostile one in which the former felt they needed to teach the latter how to be liberated. Like Tennessee Williams, Kerr linked

⁶⁸ Kerr, “Come Dance with Me.”

⁶⁹ Walter Kerr, “The Delusion about Illusion,” *New York Times*, July 21, 1968, folder 173.1, Richard Schechner Papers.

audience pleasure to passivity; unlike Williams, he did not put this passivity in the service of a broader theory of social change.

Both Kerr and, even more emphatically, *New York Times* critic Elenore Lester likened these developments to figurative or even literal rape of the audience. Citing a moment in *Dionysus* in which “members of the audience are pulled on stage for a group-grope,” Lester argued in a lengthy article on experimental theatre that “surely the next step must be programmed rape of the audience by the actors—or perhaps vice versa.” This most violent abrogation of audience autonomy, she felt, was the logical outcome of theatre produced by “a group of American kids whose basic philosophic stance is the holiness of Do Your Own Thing,” a group that grew out of the decade's (to Lester) unruly and unjustified student movements:

A final important factor in bringing about the current theater scene is the socio/political development of the past couple of years. With the hippies holding love-ins and political activists holding bash-ins with the police in such Total Environments as Whitehall St., Grand Central Station, Washington Square Park, the Columbia campus and the Pentagon, and experiencing the exhilarating sense of communal acting-out and dramatic confrontation on a basic brute level, there was drama everywhere except in the theater. It was clearly time for a change.⁷⁰

In Lester's view, the young people who had already co-opted the nation's political processes were trying to do the same to its theatre, so hell-bent were they on recapturing the seductive violence of mob mentality experienced during demonstrations against authority.

Other critics cheered the similarities they saw between the message of the play and the decade's various anti-authoritarian movements. Writing for the *Village Voice*, Ross Wetzsteon put *Dionysus* in an “antibourgeois, piss-on-the-Pentagon context,” a

⁷⁰ Elenore Lester, “...Or the Wave of the Future?,” *New York Times*, June 30, 1968, folder 173.1, Richard Schechner Papers.

reference to the October 21, 1967, anti-war march.⁷¹ John Lahr, then a young critic and clear partisan of the left, saw the play as a salutary response to the repressive, anti-democratic leanings of the political establishment and theatre in general as a possible point of resistance against the elite's silencing of ordinary voices. As he put it,

The masquerade of democracy that America witnessed at the Democratic convention will have its effect on all the arts, but most immediately on the theater. The repressiveness of the society, the symbolic armaments with which it smoothly protects itself from new ideas and fights off change are stamped on a public imagination numb to brutality. The individual's integrity and even his words—so long upheld as a creative ideal on stage—are mocked by the force of a state whose police can take both law and justice into their own hands. The radical impulse toward which new theater has been moving could only be intensified by the prospect of four more years of tepid mediocrity.⁷²

Connecting experimental theatre to the abstract expressionism of the 1940s, Lahr argued that both railed against “the ethic of materialism, conformity, and a society mechanized beyond the possibility of significant, individual political statement.” What *Dionysus* in particular brought to the table was its audience involvement, which he believed had the potential, in Brechtian fashion, to shake theatregoers from their complacent torpor and “evinced a feeling, a response that is not programmed or contrived.” The built environment of the play, Lahr argued, was similarly intended to resist establishing a single focal point on which audience members could focus in order “not merely to confuse or bludgeon audiences, but to make them come alive.” However, Lahr seemed to grasp the play's intended ambivalence toward individualistic liberation, noting that “the politics of ecstasy” could, just as repression did, become a “political enslavement of the

⁷¹ Ross Wetzsteon, article, *Village Voice*, October 17, 1968, folder 173.1, Richard Schechner Papers.

⁷² John Lahr, “The New Theater: A Retreat from Realism,” undated [1968], folder 173.1, Richard Schechner Papers.

soul.” “The orgiastic impulse in contemporary society,” he wrote, “breeds violence in its liberation.”⁷³

Robert Kirkman, a member of SDS's New York University chapter, mounted an equally passionate, equally politically-informed defense of the play. In his apoplectic attempts to control his people, Kirkman wrote, Pentheus was “a sort of Greek Grayson Kirk” who “must remind many of Lyndon Johnson.” (Kirk was president of Columbia University during the 1968 occupation.) Dionysus, however, also brought with him dangers. The people had not yet “[thought] to liberate themselves,” instead turning to another charismatic leader. But Dionysus, it would soon turn out, was merely “one new tyrant, under God.” When at the end of the play the people of Thebes carried Dionysus out of the theatre on their shoulders, Kirkman argued, “you are witnessing a classic case of co-optation. The people worship him because they feel he brought an end to the tyranny, but if their consciousness were truly revolutionary they would realize that it was they themselves that held the power. It was the people who defied Pentheus, and brought him down.” In this, the review went on to say, there were clear parallels to contemporary American society:

The themes of violence in American life, Vietnam, political assassinations, and urban rebellions run through the play, and the conclusions are analogous to the main theme. It was the people who first spoke out against the war in Vietnam, and a few politicians who followed pretending to lead. This is Dionysus; this is America; the endless revolving of oppressors (King George to the present) providing the illusion of alternatives, but with no real change in the content of people's lives. As the performance carries Dionysus out to the tune of the Star Spangled Banner, you realize he is “The Man” being held aloft by the sweaty backs of other men. The group needs only to take away their shoulders to see that Dionysus would not float in the air like a god but would fall to the ground like any oppressor. Then the group could move onto Wooster St. and proclaim that

⁷³ Ibid.

the streets belong to the people! *Dionysus in 69* is America in '68. The people know and can say "Dionysus destroyed us all." Up against the wall...!⁷⁴

Yet, what in Kirkman's eyes made *Dionysus* truly radical was not its allegorical narrative. Rather, in contrast to most experimental theatre, which he found to be "radical in content only," this play was "radical in form." Indeed, he went so far as to say that it was "the only theater I have seen, with few exceptions, that has real meaning for radicals." To understand why this was so, one need only note Kirkman's glowing description of the theatre space. "You have no seat," he wrote, "You are not an audience." Rather, "you are a player in a new form of anti-drama." Making explicit what others had (consciously or not) merely suggested, Kirkman exclaimed that "*this is participatory drama*; those who come are just as important as the actors of the Performance Group." The form of the play perfectly mirrored the content; just as the story of *Dionysus* argued that the people were no less important than their political leaders and thus should participate in the decision-making process, the design of the play held that audience members were not to be silent witnesses to drama but rather should take an active part in its production. Interestingly, though, Kirkman's review included a warning to avoid the play on weekend evenings, for it was damaged by "the Saturday night suburban theatre-going audience." The deadened, middlebrow tastes of this audience, he seemed to believe, would leave them unresponsive to the play's radical message.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Robert Kirkman, "Dialectics of Dionysus," *National Guardian*, July 6, 1968, folder 173.1, Richard Schechner Papers.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

Schechner likely would have cheered Kirkman's recognition of the intended message of *Dionysus*. By contrast, Walter Kerr's review of *Commune* so irritated Schechner that he was compelled to write a letter to the eminent critic, who seemed to believe "that I and The Performance Group swallow the propaganda of 'youth culture.'" Rather, although willing to grant that youth culture was "well-meaning," Schechner saw its "cult of love" as "sentimental and invented and not in the best interests of youth or anyone else." He *did* see *Commune* as part of the broader movement of young people who were "examining where we have been, as individuals and as a culture," but he was reluctant to attach a label to this movement. *Commune*, moreover, was ultimately intended as a condemnation of those who thought they could simply opt out: "the functioning commune in the play is the Group; the themes of the play are about a very brutal society in which there is no way out—no Utopia, no free Commune somewhere in the Southwest. We are together, from first to last."⁷⁶ To Kerr's eyes, this ambiguity, however well-intentioned, simply did not come across. In both *Commune* and, he recalled, the earlier *Dionysus*, "we suppose that we are dealing with an affirmation (of freedom in 'Dionysus,' of the youth commune spirit in 'Commune.') You say you don't intend it that way. But it *looks* that way."⁷⁷ Schechner conceded this point, admitting that "of course arguing intentions is fruitless."⁷⁸

That is not to say, however, that Richard Schechner and The Performance Group did not have a horse in the race of 1960s politics. Indeed, they rejected the counterculture not because they found it disruptive, but because it was not political enough. *Dionysus*

⁷⁶ Richard Schechner to Walter Kerr, December 23, 1970, box 165.12, Richard Schechner Papers.

⁷⁷ Walter Kerr to Richard Schecher, January 5, 1971, box 165.12, Richard Schechner Papers.

⁷⁸ Richard Schechner to Walter Kerr, January 30, 1971, box 165.12, Richard Schechner Papers.

was about its era, Schechner observed ten years later, and that era, however flawed, had more potential than what followed. “That the period ended,” he wrote, “and Nixon and his values prevailed, well, that's another story—maybe with its Athenian parallels also. That later Athens left us with no drama, only criticism.”⁷⁹ The director even admitted to fantasies of joining a band of revolutionaries pillaging the homes of the bourgeoisie, including his own. He regularly condemned the Vietnam War, which he saw as an imperialistic search for more workers to exploit.⁸⁰ *Commune* especially was a clear condemnation of what Schechner called “the Death Culture of techno-fascist America.”⁸¹ Translating this political orientation to the aesthetic realm, Schechner described the argument over “the benefits of a participating versus a watching audience” as “a miniature cold war.” He went so far as to argue that the non-traditional style of the Group, which identified no single author, resisted linear narratives, and drew no distinctions between performers and audience members, was a direct result of “the bomb, the Nuremberg and Eichmann trials, participatory democracy, and socialism (as a goal, not as it is practiced in any country today).” What these diverse developments had in common, of course, was pointing out the dangers of blindly following orders. As a result, Schechner argued, performers “resist thinking of themselves as anyone's tools—the director's, the playwright's, the producer's, the public's, the government's.”⁸² The collective nature of their work served a more specific function as a rejection of the

⁷⁹ Richard Schechner to Joel Schechter, August 1, 1980, folder 166.1, Richard Schechner Papers.

⁸⁰ Richard Schechner, “The Politics of Ecstasy,” in Schechner, *Public Domain: Essays on the Theatre* (New York: Avon, 1969), 219, 221-2. The piece was written in 1968.

⁸¹ Richard Schechner, “After the Blow-Up in the Garage,” *New York Times*, December 13, 1970, folder 165.14, Richard Schechner Papers.

⁸² Richard Schechner, “Want to Watch? Or Act?,” *New York Times*, January 12, 1969, folder 173.2, Richard Schechner Papers.

capitalist ethos, which Schechner believed turned art (and artists) into commodities to be bought and sold. “Under the Protestant-capitalist ethic,” he argued, invoking Max Weber, “nothing formally distinguishes the labor of the artist from the labor of any other worker—and labor is bought and sold by the piece or by the hour.”

Other productions further confirmed the importance of political engagement. Roughly during the time that the Group was developing *Commune*, members proposed a two-act play based on a series of trials. While it is unclear if this play was ever fully developed or produced, it clearly intended to use audience involvement to induce spectators to think about politics. For the three trials that constituted the play, audience members were separated by age into three groups: “youngers,” “middles” (people under forty), and “olders” (people over forty). In Act One, the first two groups were the jury; in Act Two, the third group. Act One, set twenty years in the future in the Revolutionary States of America (RSA), concerns the trial of a government official, “W,” who has been accused of “Anti-Revolutionary Activities” including “(a) unecological acts: failure to recycle cans[,] driving more than his ration[,] littering[;] (b) government lawlessness: resistance to enforcing the Anti-Discrimination Language Act[; and] (c) chauvinism: maintaining male chauvinist attitudes[,] making pro-American statements.” The audience of “olders” was encouraged to “cheer W...when they feel he makes a good point” and “hoot and jeer the state’s case.” The play assumed that the “olders” would believe in W’s innocence, even providing a character named “The Leader,” who would attempt to “organize them to either verbal or physical resistance” were a guilty verdict returned. “The point of this act,” the script noted, “is to allow the Youngers to operate within a system that metes out personal injustice for what is considered (legally) to be the

greater good...and to show the Olders (and Middles) how their own system can come acropper against them.”⁸³

Set in the present, Act Two was intended to show the injustices built into the current system. It featured three different, simultaneously occurring trials: in the first, “a young ‘hippie’ type who is also a political activist” was tried in front of a “scrupulously fair and circumspect” judge on charges of marijuana possession “trumped up” by the police. In the second, a young person accused of a political crime such as “incitement to riot” or “conspiracy to bomb the Statue of Liberty” would face a judge “clearly biased” against the defendant, although the evidence would suggest that s/he talked about these acts but did not commit them. Finally, a “political figure” would be accused by a “clearly intolerant judge” of “a phoney, cover-up set of charges.” In all cases, it was assumed that the jury of “olders” would return a guilty verdict, setting off waves of discontent among the “youngers.” As the play notes put it, “all of these trials are designed to make it clear that the *present* system, like the future one (in Act 1) mete[s] out a variety of injustices in ‘court’ rooms...and that the system (with its roles) forces the people to acquiesce (as jurors and as audience).”⁸⁴

Finally, analysis of performance studies, the field that grew out of Richard Schechner’s experiments with the Group, also adds much to our understanding of the white New Left’s investment in authenticity. Just as other historians, most importantly Doug Rossinow, have identified and analyzed the significance of authenticity to the 1960s Left, I am not the first scholar to apply the lessons of performance theory to

⁸³ Unnamed play, undated [circa 1970], folder 165.14, Richard Schechner Papers.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

history.⁸⁵ In her masterful, paradigm-setting work on Hull-House, for example, Shannon Jackson has argued that, through interactions with their working-class and poor immigrant neighbors, Jane Addams and her cohort conceived of identity as not “a thing, but a way of living”; in other words, it was not something one *had*, but rather something one *did*—and did repeatedly.⁸⁶ Nor am I the first to note that performance was a term with a great deal of cultural currency in the 1960s; as both Howard Brick (using the term “artifice”) and Robert Genter (developing the concept of “late modernism”) have argued, much of this emphasis on performance derived from or was related to the influence of Erving Goffman’s 1959 *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*.⁸⁷ However, no one has yet drawn the lines of connection between performance theory and SDS, which were born of the same historical moment and, I argue, the same ideological underpinnings. Performance theory adds another layer to our understanding of the white New Left’s conception of identity as at once a thing that one *had* and a thing that one *did*, a quality at once authentic and performative. More pointedly, the way to attain authenticity was to become a performer. In this way, young radicals echoed not only Stella Adler’s emphasis on action, but also the Frankfurt School architects of anti-totalitarianism. While performance studies emerged through applying the lessons of political protest to performance, SDS members hoped to apply aspects of performance to protest. By performance, though, they meant not the donning of masks, but rather the external

⁸⁵ Doug Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

⁸⁶ Shannon Jackson, *Lines of Activity: Performance, Historiography, Hull-House Domesticity* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1998).

⁸⁷ Howard Brick, *Age of Contradiction: American Thought and Culture in the 1960s* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); Robert Genter, *Late Modernism: Art, Culture, and Politics in Cold War America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 1959).

expression of the earnest yearnings found in, for example, the Port Huron Statement. The New Left and performance theory were not only similar, but mutually constitutive.

The previous two chapters show, that is, that the political structure envisioned by SDS members bore much in common with the model of performance promulgated by Richard Schechner and his cohort. Both groups imagined that, untethered from the necessity of participating in alienating paid labor by an automated, post-scarcity economy, people would be free to engage in activities more akin to children's play than to the conventional (repressive) pursuits of adulthood. As SDS intellectual forefather Paul Goodman noted wistfully, children were happy playing games for hours at a time. "I was out in the car and there was a gang of kids," he told Roger Ebert in 1964, "ten to thirteen years old, across the street in the playground, playing softball not very well. When I went past that same place four hours later, the same kids were still playing." There was no reason in the world, he argued (other than the demands of capitalism), why adults should not be able to do "the things which really absorbed them, which they felt they were getting something out of and which they kept doing therefore for long hours."⁸⁸ This was the same child's play that Schechner found so admirable in Brecht and that the director further settled on as a useful analogy for performance. The imaginative, often pretend character of child's play made it no less authentic; as Schechner pointed out, the emotional identifications experienced by children pretending to shoot or die while playing "cowboys and Indians" were made no less real by the fact that those involved had never gone through such experiences (nor, as he would later argue, was authenticity

⁸⁸ Paul Goodman, "Growing up Absorbed," in "Triple Revolution, Together with Commentary by Dave Dellinger and Growing up Absorbed, Paul Goodman," 1964, series 4B, no. 3, Students for a Democratic Society Papers. This piece was previously published as an interview in the *Daily Illini* and in the April, 1964 edition of *Liberation*.

diminished by repetition).⁸⁹ Similarly, it would then seem that the authentic selves SDS members believed would emerge in a post-work, post-scarcity world were quite compatible with imagination and repetition—that is, with performance. While an organized athletic event such as softball would not necessarily have functioned in the same way as did imaginative role-playing, especially in terms of identification and emotion, what Goodman’s and Schechner’s points had in common was a yearning for freedom from the repressive demands of adulthood.

Indeed, it would seem that, ironically, performance often functioned as the very measure of authenticity for SDS members. As in John Dewey’s assessment of Hull-
House, these young radicals conceived, for instance, of the university as not “a thing, but a way of living”—and, moreover, a way of living *like artists*. In the discussion that began this chapter (addressed in more depth in chapter five), I argued that, for many SDS members, living authentically and living like an artist were one and the same. Lacking the physicality of the dancer—for whom years of rigid discipline and repeated movements made authentic self-expression possible—or the ability to engage in the self-consciously personal revelations of the writer, members felt that “we are really ‘unfree’—not because we do not have the potential to express the thoughts and feelings within us—and to express them in very beautiful and unusual ways—but because we have never learned to use this potential.”⁹⁰ As SDS free university guru Rich Horevitz argued, emulating artistic practices could help counter the view that “one’s own internal and psychological life” was “something evil or threatening, something to be repressed or

⁸⁹ Richard Schechner, “Exit Thirties, Enter Sixties,” in Schechner, *Public Domain: Essays on the Theatre* (New York: Avon, 1969). The piece was written in 1965.

⁹⁰ “To Blue and Other People,” July 29, 1965.

obliterated.”⁹¹ The role SDS members envisioned for the university was thus one in which, through disciplining the body, repetition, and imagination (all necessary components of artistic creation), they could learn to express (perform) their authentic selves. Authenticity was important to SDS members only in direct proportion to its expression; as an internal quality it was useless. Authenticity, in other words, only attained legitimacy when it was performed in front of other people, and performance, rather than a disguise, was an expression of one’s true inner self. Performative authenticity was also imagined as an antidote to the standardizing effects of mass culture, under which, as one young radical put it, “the self is never encouraged to think of itself as theatrical or significant.”⁹²

Todd Gitlin, SDS member, president (1963-4), and eventual chronicler, has also noted the importance of self-expression to these young radicals. As noted in chapter five, what most drew the young Gitlin to the organization was the realization that its members “lived as if life mattered profoundly, as if—this is hard to say without sounding mawkish, yet it seemed this way at the time—as if you could actually take life in your hands and live it deliberately, as if it were an artwork.” They sought “to transcend the multiplicity and confusion of roles that become normal in a rationalized society: the rifts between work and family, between public and private, between strategic, calculating reason and spontaneous, expressive emotion.”⁹³

⁹¹ Rich Horevitz to Carolyn Craven, July 28, 1965.

⁹² Charlie Simpson, “Kennedy’s Cultural Center Is a Leopard-Skin Pillbox Hat, in *Caw!*, 1968, series 4A, no. 4, Students for a Democratic Society Papers.

⁹³ Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam, 1987), 106-7.

Gitlin connected SDS members' attempts to live life "as if it were an artwork" to their "expressive politics," a concept he defined almost entirely in terms of performance:

Expressive politics wanted the pain to stop, now. In the Gandhian form of expression, you wagered your body as the sign of your witness. In the later Sixties, a less restrained expressive dramaturgy emerged. Demonstrators should refuse to sit still; politics should shake, rattle, and roll, move body and soul. Gandhian or raucous, expressive politics wanted you to "put your body on the line"—not only to win demands, but *to feel good*. It wanted to "do what the spirit say do," as a SNCC song put it. It trusted feeling and wanted to "let it all hang out." The implicit theory of expressive politics was that the structures of private feeling begin before the individual, in capitalist acquisition and the patriarchal family; public in its origins, private feeling should therefore be expressed where it belongs, in public. Its faith was that a politics of universal expression would make the right things happen—and be its own reward.⁹⁴

As understood by Gitlin, Karl Marx's theory of alienation, which focused on the effects capitalist production had on the self, informed a version of authenticity that demanded public performance. Marx, it seems, was a performance theorist.

Ultimately, for SDS members, external behaviors that genuinely reflected who one was on the inside formed the very essence of authenticity, and in this way authenticity was not only inherently performative, but also inextricably tied to their theory of how social change took place. These young people conceived of performance not as a mask or a costume, not as something in any way fake. Rather, it was a way of expressing one's truest self, of sharing one's most deeply-held thoughts, feelings, and beliefs with others—with an audience. This belief not only connected the New Left to such earlier artists as Tennessee Williams, but also locates SDS conceptions of identity in a distinctly pre-postmodern way of thinking; while authenticity may have depended on the performance of one's true self, young radicals never doubted that this true self existed and could be located and expressed.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 135.

This insistence on the free expression of one's true, authentic self, which itself derived, as I have argued throughout this dissertation, from Cold War fears of totalitarianism, also helps to explain one of the key differences between the Old and New Left: the absence of a cultural front in the 1960s. As earlier chapters have shown, SDS members rejected the *politics* of their leftist predecessors because they were perceived as too beholden to systematic and ideological explanations of the world, which in the minds of SDS members were inextricably tied to the suppression of individual thought and the victory of totalitarianism. This chapter has shown that they rejected the *culture* of the Old Left for the same reason, as explicitly political art was seen as taking away the individual's right to express her or his true self. For these reasons, even politically conservative artists whose work nonetheless functioned as a true reflection of their insides were more useful to SDS members than were left-leaning artists who, in producing only "mechanical" manifestations of deterministic theories that could never adequately account for the human experience, allowed themselves to be turned into machines.

Finally, SDS and the form of experimental theatre discussed here also shared a common gender politics, one in which women's attempts to express their own experiences, emotions, and analyses of the world were derided as inauthentic vestiges of false consciousness, bourgeois hang-ups to be discarded if one hoped to break free from the repressive conformity of mainstream society. In my eighth and final chapter, I will describe and analyze how the challenges women's liberationists mounted to these attempts to delegitimize their own thoughts and beliefs both drew on and refashioned the SDS concepts of authenticity and identity. Whereas the male-dominated group clung

desperately to their belief in an *individual* self that lay buried under years of socialization, women's liberationists were much more comfortable with the idea of a *collectively* created self—one that, though determined by surrounding alternative, egalitarian social structures, was no less authentic.

Chapter Eight: “Our Politics Begin with Our Feelings”: Women’s Liberation and Authentic Selfhood

“...when women get together to study and analyze their own experiences it means they are sick but when Chinese peasants or Guatemalan guerillas get together and use the identical method they are revolutionary.” — Redstockings, 1969¹

The previous three chapters have worked to excavate and analyze the origins and significance of early Students for a Democratic Society’s anti-systematic, self-based politics. I have argued that their understanding of authenticity was based on a rejection of overarching theories and analyses, which were seen as stepping-stones to totalitarianism, in favor of an individualistic humanism that made the self, and its experiences and emotions, the measure of truth. As the 1960s wore on, however, this position became increasingly untenable. The anti-ideological, humanistic bent of early SDS was replaced with a growing militancy and an increased fealty to rigid dogma. Almost all histories of SDS attribute these changes to the escalation of the Vietnam War and, concomitantly, to the organization’s almost single-minded focus on opposing it. After an April 1965 anti-war march that coincidentally took place just as Lyndon Johnson was expanding military operations, new members flocked to the organization, overwhelming the tightly-knit, earnestly idealistic movement “Old Guard.” As the war came to seem less “an aberration from a larger pattern of fundamentally benign U.S. activity in the world,” as anti-war liberals argued, and more an example of a broader

¹ Redstockings, “Resistances to Consciousness,” 1969, folder 1.29, Women’s Liberation Research Files, Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University [hereafter “Women’s Liberation Research Files”].

pattern of U.S. imperialism, third-world revolutionaries and marginalized Americans increasingly seemed the only viable models of resistance against the status quo.²

For women, the group's post-1965 changes were disastrous. As several histories of the women's liberation movement point out, women were never treated as equals in SDS, yet they were able to attain some leadership positions, especially in Economic Research and Action Projects, as long as the organization remained focused on community organizing. By 1968-9, the two main factions in SDS were the Weathermen, which looked to the Black Panther Party as the only authentically revolutionary vanguard, and the Maoist Progressive Labor Party. Both groups tended to see women's liberation as bourgeois, with the Weathermen, who notoriously believed in armed struggle, particularly focused on rooting out "sissiness" in the movement. In the face of these developments, women's multiple attempts to have their voices heard and their issues discussed were derided or ignored, cast as peripheral to the seemingly more important anti-draft, anti-imperialism, and anti-capitalist issues on which men in the organization were focused. Eventually, many women decided that working within the male-dominated left was fruitless, and they formed their own organizations where their emotions, experiences, and analyses of the world would be recognized. Similar processes took place within the Black Power movement and the Chicano/Chicana movement. In tracing the evolution of the groups and individuals that came out of SDS, my analysis of

² Doug Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America* (New York: Columbia University Press), 218.

the women's liberation movement is limited to a discussion of the same white activist cohort discussed in the previous three chapters.³

The women's liberation movement was one strand of the broader movement known as second-wave feminism. Second-wave feminism was a vast, cross-class, multi-racial movement. One point of distinction particularly salient to this dissertation are the differences between the women's liberation movement and the liberal feminism discussed in chapter three. By the time women's liberation was in its gestational period, liberal feminism was already well-developed. Populated by a combination of labor movement women and such Popular Front feminists as Betty Friedan, liberal feminism coalesced around the National Organization for Women (NOW). NOW was founded in 1966 in Washington, D.C., at the third annual conference bringing together women who had been involved in John F. Kennedy's President's Commission on the Status of Women and similar state-level initiatives. When several of the conference conveners balked at the idea of aggressively pushing the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to pursue complaints of gender-based discrimination for fear of undoing women-only protective legislation, a frustrated breakaway group gathered in Betty

³ There are several excellent, and highly readable, monographs that describe the changes that took place in SDS after 1965. See, for example, David Barber, *A Hard Rain Fell: SDS and Why It Failed* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008); Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam, 1987); James Miller, *"Democracy Is in the Streets": From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987); and Carl Oglesby's recent memoir *Ravens in the Storm: A Personal History of the 1960s Antiwar Movement* (New York: Scribner, 2008), especially notable for its evocative descriptions of the criticism leveled against Oglesby by Weatherman Bernardine Dohrn. For the effects of these changes on women and the development of an independent women's liberation movement, see Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989); Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980 [1979]); Evans, *Tidal Wave: How Women Changed America at Century's End* (New York: The Free Press, 2003); Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (New York: Penguin, 2000); and Benita Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America's Second Wave* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). More recent works have also emphasized the multi-racial, cross-class nature of second-wave feminism. See Nancy A. Hewitt, ed., *No Permanent Waves: Recasting Histories of U.S. Feminism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010).

Friedan's hotel room to found the new organization. By this point, Friedan had moved beyond her earlier focus on self-actualization, and, with her at the helm, NOW quickly became a centralized clearinghouse for feminist political activism. Very much a civil rights organization, NOW focused on breaking down the barriers that denied women equal access to such institutions as education, fairly paid and fulfilling employment, and political representation. According to its founding statement, the organization aimed "to bring women into full participation in the mainstream of American society now," not to revolutionize that mainstream society.⁴

The women's liberation movement had a different origin story, a different focus, and a different organizational structure.⁵ Many of its members were trained in the anti-racist Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and SDS. Like the women who developed liberal feminism, those who became women's liberationists were aware of sexism early in their activist lives. In 1964, an anonymous group of women, including Mary King and Casey Hayden, drafted a SNCC position paper comparing the status of women in the movement to the status of African Americans in society. The following year, King and Hayden circulated "A Kind of Memo" throughout SDS, describing women's marginalization and poor treatment even at the hands of leftist men. One month after their memo appeared, at a December 1965 SDS conference in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois, some women met alone for the first time to discuss their position in the movement. Subsequent decisions to form their own organizations were gradual, taking place over the course of the next several years as movement men failed to recognize and correct their own sexism, and incomplete, with some "politicos" choosing to remain

⁴Quoted in Evans, *Tidal Wave*, 24.

within the male-dominated left. By 1969, however, autonomous women's liberation groups had popped up across the country. These groups were autonomous not only from the male-dominated left, but also from each other. Applying the lessons of participatory democracy to their own organizational structure, white women's liberationists who organized independently of SDS preferred small, autonomous groups to the centralized NOW. Rather than pursuing a rights-based agenda devoted to securing legislative and other more conventionally political remedies to sexism, as NOW did, women's liberationists formed consciousness-raising groups in which members discussed the most intimate aspects of their lives. Telling their own stories about body image, sex, what came to be called sexual harassment, rape, abortion, housework, childrearing, and beyond, these women quickly realized that their own painful individual experiences were shared by many others. Any adequate political theory needed to acknowledge the truth of these experiences, and, indeed, ought to grow out of these experiences.⁶

In many ways, the group of women's liberationists discussed here replayed the debate that took place in early SDS over feelings versus program. They also replayed a pattern with a longer history. Like Stella Adler and her students, Betty Friedan, and the women Beats, they perceived a discrepancy between the egalitarian discourse of authenticity and its sexist deployment. Trained through both a broader culture deeply influenced by Cold War anti-totalitarianism, humanistic psychology, Method acting, and Beat writing and their own more specific experiences within SDS to think of the self as the bedrock of truth, women's liberationists could not help but notice that the men who dominated the organization had no interest in women's personal truths. As Beat men insisted that women's lives were too narrow to produce authentic art, SDS men argued

⁶ On women's liberation, see also Evans, *Personal Politics*; Evans, *Tidal Wave*; Echols; Rosen; and Roth.

that women's concerns lay outside the political realm. Like earlier generations of women, the liberationists who withdrew from SDS attempted to write themselves into the culture of authenticity, and they did so in ways very similar to their forebears—not only the women involved in Method acting and Beat writing, but also individuals such as Tennessee Williams, whose anti-fascist political-aesthetic theory was perhaps the closest cultural analogue to the consciousness raising of the women's liberation movement. They believed, as Williams did, that telling the truth about their lives, emotions, and experiences—and doing so in front of an audience—was a necessary step in bringing about social and political change. Unlike Williams, as well as Adler, her students, and the women Beats, however, women's liberationist saw the recognition of each person's authentic truth as a first step, not an end goal. Once this authentic truth was recognized, that is, one needed to act to change the *broader* society so that it more closely emulated the egalitarian social relations of consciousness-raising groups. These changes would make it possible to express one's authentic self in all aspects of life rather than just seeking refuge in small enclaves of like-minded women. As 1950s aesthetic strategies became 1960s political tools and anti-totalitarianism became identity politics, authenticity was transformed from a discourse that excluded women into one of the most powerful weapons in their arsenal.

Like the men in SDS, the liberationists who separated from the organization believed that existing theories were inadequate to explain the reality of their lives and that the self—and its attendant emotions and experiences—was the only measure of truth. Despite a genuine belief in this anti-ideological view of the world, SDS men had never been willing to put these beliefs into practice where women were concerned; as a result,

the validity of SDS women's thoughts and feelings would be acknowledged only once they formed their own breakaway groups. Liberationists pushed forward the self-based anti-theoretical theory to which they were exposed in SDS by insisting that the expression of their own individual truths could lead to important collective truths. In the small groups formed for the purpose of consciousness raising, women's liberationists argued, women could determine their own truths—and, importantly, begin acting out the egalitarian social relations that would allow for the ongoing expression of their true selves. To this group of women's liberationists, that is, authenticity and collectivity were not necessarily at odds. Indeed, it was often the latter that made the former possible, and a socially-created (or constructed) self could still be an authentic self. The white men who dominated SDS did observe differences between mass socialization and face-to-face, community-based socialization, leading them in theory to see the compatibility of the constructed self and the authentic self. However, this subtle distinction was often lost in both practice and everyday parlance, and SDS men frequently argued that women should be able to transcend the deleterious aspects of their own socialization.

The liberationists who emerged from SDS were certainly conscious of the ways in which their focus on the self as the measure of truth echoed the male-dominated organization's language and worldview. Indeed, they had helped to determine it. As several historians of SDS have pointed out, Casey Hayden influenced the Port Huron Statement both as her husband, Tom Hayden, drafted it and at the 1962 convention where it was finalized and ratified. Doug Rossinow even notes that the manifesto's language paralleled that of the Austin, Texas, Christian Faith-and-Life Community (CFLC), where

Casey was a member and her 1961 marriage to Tom took place.⁷ As in the quotation that begins this chapter, women in SDS were certainly aware that their own thoughts and feelings were not granted the validity that their male counterparts ascribed to third-world revolutionaries, and, as historian Sara Evans has noted, consciousness raising explicitly drew on the “Guatemala Guerilla approach” described by Greg Calvert in 1967.⁸ Yet, to a large extent, historians have not noted the connection between the self-based politics of the women’s liberation movement and the anti-theoretical humanism of early SDS, arguing instead that the heady, intellectually competitive nature of the organization made it difficult for women’s voices to be heard even in its early years.⁹ Certainly this was true. Yet, the organization’s intellectualizing was insistently anti-intellectual, its theorizing adamantly anti-theoretical, its position papers lamenting the inadequacy of its positions—all concepts with a great deal of currency in the women’s liberation movement. Rossinow’s excellent book on the importance of authenticity to the 1960s left does include a chapter on feminism; however, as elsewhere in the study, he focuses on one level of authenticity—the need to break free from repressive and damaging social forces—to the exclusion of what I see as its most important definition—a politics based not on theories and ideologies, but rather on the self.

Drawing on archival records of the strand of the women’s liberation movement that came out of SDS and, to a lesser extent, published works, this chapter will fill in the historiographical gap described above, revealing how these particular women’s liberationists both drew on and refashioned the anti-theoretical, self-based politics of

⁷ Rossinow, 80-1.

⁸ Evans, 175.

⁹ This is the interpretation largely advanced by Echols, Evans, and Rosen.

early SDS. I attempt to synthesize the thinking of the white women's liberation movement, analyzing statements that came out of groups across the United States. In New York, important groups included New York Radical Women, which upon its 1967 founding became the city's first women's liberation group; Redstockings, founded in 1969 by members of New York Radical Women; and The Feminists, which split from NOW in 1968. I also draw on documents from the Chicago-based Westside group, founded in 1967 as the nation's first women's liberation group, and its 1969 successor, Chicago Women's Liberation Movement. In Boston, important works emerged from Cell 16 and Bread and Roses, founded in 1968 and 1969, respectively. However, women's liberation was not just a phenomenon of the urban north, and I also draw on evidence from groups in such cities as Berkeley and Oakland, California; Atlanta, Georgia; and Gainesville, Florida.

While women's liberationists in these groups agreed that social structures—specifically, in their case, patriarchy—alienated all people from their true, authentic selves, the way they conceived of this problem, and the solutions they proposed, were considerably different from those of their male counterparts. To begin, liberationists were considerably more divided regarding the concept of brainwashing. A vocal contingent refused to believe, that is, that individuals could simply choose to transcend the social forces that had shaped their lives, as SDS men often insisted was possible. In this way, women's liberationists also differed from the liberal feminists discussed in chapter three and the Beat women discussed in chapter four, both groups who believed in women's ability to choose to escape their conventional, inauthentic lives. This difference fed directly into the second, most important challenge liberationists issued to earlier

visions of authentic selfhood: their version of authenticity depended on realizing a collectively-discovered truth through that would point toward the egalitarian social relations that would allow people to express their own authentic truths not just in the sanctuary of consciousness-raising groups, but also in the broader world. However, they still believed that such collective truths needed constantly to be tested against the reality of individual lived experience.

Patriarchy and the Alienation of the Self

One important debate about individuality, collectivity, and brainwashing played out over the issues of consumerism and beauty culture. Perhaps surprisingly, women's liberationists in my sample promulgated no monolithic view in this debate; indeed, they often disagreed with one another as heartily as with the dominant culture. Echoing other contributors to the authenticity debate, one side argued that women had been brainwashed into participation in consumer culture and encouraged them to give up the accoutrements of conventional femininity. The other side took a more nuanced view, insisting that participation in consumer culture was a reasonable, indeed necessary, response to exploitative conditions and that those who adhered to the brainwashing theory reduced structural problems to individual choices. This side of the debate served as one example of how women's liberationists attempted to refigure SDS men's insistence that it was possible and desirable to achieve authenticity through individual resistance to mass socialization.¹⁰

¹⁰ In his own study on authenticity in the women's liberation movement, Doug Rossinow only sees the first side in this debate, and thus his analysis does not allow for the differences I see in the versions of authenticity promulgated by male-dominated left and women's liberation or between liberal feminism and women's liberation, reducing both feminist versions to a matter of individual choice. Rossinow, 321-22.

Both perspectives, however, responded to similar tendencies within the dominant culture, in which, by the 1960s, another version of femininity appeared alongside the homemaker: the sexy, devil-may-care girl—never woman—who expressed her individuality through what she chose to buy and how she chose to adorn herself. Described in opposition to both the homemaker and the feminist, the characteristics of this “New Girl” were explained in one interesting example by author John Clellon Holmes in a 1968 essay for *Playboy*.

At first, Holmes’ piece read as if he were sympathetic to the concerns of women’s liberationists. He was quick to criticize, for example, “the traditional idea that women, unlike men, are somehow supposed to be *fulfilled* by the roles they play.” According to Holmes, these roles were not chosen freely by women but rather “were conceived by men for the most part and reflected male attitudes that had their source in male needs.” Moreover, he recognized that for women, as for African Americans, adopting one of the available roles was a necessity if one hoped to navigate a sexist, racist society. As he put it, “oppressed groups, in order to survive, are forced to act out the image of themselves...that their oppressors find most acceptable.”¹¹

Yet, despite his recognition of how social forces shaped people’s lives, Holmes’ celebration of the New Girl, whom he saw as breaking free from oppressive roles to embrace a more authentic femininity, was severely problematic for feminists. By 1968, when Holmes’ article appeared and circulated throughout SDS, women in the organization had already experienced years of being simultaneously sexualized and

¹¹ John Clellon Holmes, “The New Girl: An Appreciative Appraisal of the Emergent Modern Female,” 1968, Students for a Democratic Society Papers, series 3, no. 123, (Glen Rock, N.J.: Microfilming Corp. of America, 1977), microfilm [hereafter “Students for a Democratic Society Papers”]. The piece was originally published in *Playboy*.

depoliticized, and they had begun to develop a language to combat such treatment. In line with the most dismissive tendencies of men in SDS, Holmes insisted that the New Girl happily rejected “the historically most recent, and emotionally least fulfilling, role of all (created by women themselves)—that of the feminist.” Holmes’ New Girl was, in his words, also a “Postfeminist Girl.” Adhering to Marynia Farnham and Ferdinand Lundberg’s 1947 argument that “psychologically, feminism had a single objective: the achievement of maleness by the female,” Holmes insisted that feminism had kept women from embracing their femininity and, as a result, their full humanity.¹²

By contrast, the New Girl “wants to know nothing less than what it is like to be a female human being, no longer either a willing *or* a rebellious appendage to some man but her own unique self” (all the better if this “unique self” left little of the New Girl’s body to the imagination, as Holmes assured his readers was indeed the case). Moreover, Holmes argued, the appearance of the New Girl was the harbinger of a broader generational shift, and as such ought to be welcomed rather than shunned by men. The generation coming of age in the 1960s was “more passionately than ever before engaged in posing questions, and most of their questions have to do with the stereotyped life roles their elders expect them to take for granted. ‘The time it takes to hypnotize the young into standardization is called ‘growing up’” (as one of them has said), and they want no part of this.” The New Girl, Holmes believed, would play a key role in helping her generational cohorts escape from the repressive forces of conformity:

If the search for a new, more direct experience of the self is the overriding quest of this time...women may be better equipped than men for the arduous journey inward. Having been forced into masks and made to act as if the masks were real, having had no choice but to somehow survive as themselves *within* a role, and

¹² Ibid.

having at last gained that psychic freedom without which all social freedom is a sham, young women today are singularly prepared to function on the personal, subjective, nonabstract *now* level where this generation (boys as well as girls) believes its truths will be found.¹³

Ultimately, then, the New Girl's supposed authenticity was important because she would help young men find their own true selves, for, as Holmes went on to argue, women's greater experience with role-playing could help men to recognize, and escape from, certain expressions of masculinity. "Done with roles herself" and "impatient with all the *routines* to which role playing leads," Holmes noted, "the New Girl fully expects her young man to act the same." Intensely aware of "the disparity between the actor and the part he plays, between social codes and human nature," she was determined "to tell it like it is"—and demanded the same of those around her. In this way, the New Girl's rejection of roles "may compel men into a re-evaluation of some of the more 'he-mannish' aspects of masculinity, for she knows that having to prove one's manliness is as false as having to act womanly and, though she understands the dilemma, she has less and less patience with it, and this is bound to put a certain degree of pressure on men." Holmes concluded that "the Postfeminist Girl is pioneering in what may be the emotional landscape of tomorrow, a new Garden of Eden from which only the sense of sin and dissemblance will be expelled, and clearly men will profit fully as much as she from her explorations into a more candid and authentic femininity." If this argument differed in some obvious ways from the male-female relationships featured in Holmes' proto-Beat novel *Go*—in which women provided material support for their artistic male partners—it echoed these ideas in even more important ways. In both cases, women were important for how they aided men's pursuits of authenticity.¹⁴

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Not surprisingly, women's liberationists found fault with Holmes' celebration of a woman "hurrying down the street in her white plastic boots or plum-colored snubby flats, her figure *there* for all to see—in miniskirt or minipants or miniseparates; her dress, more than not, designed to reveal her lingerie and her lingerie, more than not, designed to reveal her body," a woman whose value lay in being "kinky, pert, daring, frivolous, flamboyant, theatrical and unabashedly sexy."¹⁵ They likely would have dismissed Holmes' *New Girl* as yet another of the male-created roles the author purported to reject. It is interesting, then, that their responses took such divergent forms: one camp that would have seen the *New Girl* as brainwashed and another that would have explained her behavior as a reasonable reaction to a sexist culture. Both camps, however, argued that true, authentic selves could only be attained through altered, more egalitarian, social relations. Various iterations and degrees of both positions made their way into almost every document produced by this strand of the women's liberation movement. The first position was most clearly expressed by Naomi Jaffe, a veteran of New York SDS, and Bernardine Dohrn, a Chicago native, civil rights and anti-draft activist, and future Weatherman who grew close to Jaffe while in New York working with the Lawyers Guild. The second position was most fully explicated by Ellen Willis, a journalist, member of New York Radical Women, and Redstockings co-founder, and Rosalyn Baxandall, a social worker, anti-war and welfare and children's rights activist who also belonged to both New York Radical Women and Redstockings.

Writing in the SDS publication *New Left Notes*, Jaffe and Dohrn responded in 1968 to a view common among New Left men: the portrayal of the women's liberation movement as cute, sexy, and non-threatening. The authors' immediate target was a

¹⁵ Ibid.

recent cover of *Ramparts*, another New Left publication, which depicted the movement as the shapely torso of a woman with no head. Jaffee and Dohrn argued that this was merely one example of how not only women, but also men, had been denied their full humanity and “reified (manipulated as objects).”¹⁶ Rather than a world in which people’s thoughts, feelings, and actions were determined by rigidly prescribed roles and rules, the women posited an ideal social order in which all people possessed “autonomy” and could look forward to the “possibilities of becoming vital human beings again.”

The enemy they identified was not men, but rather capitalism and its handmaiden, consumer culture. Capitalism’s constant search for new markets, the authors argued, forced women to think of their identities as solely defined by the products with which they adorned themselves. In the authors’ words,

the same new things that allow us to express our new sense of freedom and naturalness and movement—swinky, body-revealing clothing, fun-gimmicky accessories—are also used to force us to be consumers of the endless flow of products necessary for the perpetuation of a repressive society. Mini-skirts and costume-clothes and high boots and transparent makeup are fun and expressive and pretty; at the same time they are self-expression through things—through acquiring rather than becoming—and it is the expression of all human needs through commodities which sustains an economy that has to produce and sell more and more goods in order to survive.¹⁷

This analysis reads as a point-by-point refutation of John Clellon Holmes’ assertion that women’s participation in consumer culture was a way of breaking free from the social forces that dictated taste to express one’s true, authentic (unmanipulated) self.

¹⁶ Naomi Jaffee and Bernardine Dohrn, “The Look Is You,” undated (circa 1968-1970), folder 2.43, Women’s Liberation Research Files. The piece was originally published in *New Left Notes* on March 18, 1968.

¹⁷ Ibid.

Jaffee and Dohrn further argued that the reification of *humans* into *things*, which was an inevitable result of capitalist market expansion, infiltrated all other areas in life and was, in fact, one of the causes of patriarchy. Once a social system had trained people to think of themselves as objects, they could not help but think about their relationships with others in this way, too. In the authors' words, "the relationships of a market economy are reflected and reinforced in the dynamic and the forms of human relationships. The real needs of people are translated into a currency of possession, exclusivity, and investment—a language of commodities in which people are the goods." Although Jaffee and Dohrn recognized that both men and women were affected by the commodification of identity, the perception of women as "primarily sexual creatures" rendered them particularly susceptible to the siren song of consumer culture, and thus the cycle was self-perpetuating.

These ideas were echoed by three SDS veterans who were members of the Chicago-based Westside group. As Evelyn Goldfield, Sue Munaker, and Heather Booth argued in a piece for *Ramparts*, "Women today are oppressed largely through their roles as consumers. Modern capitalism generates the sexual mystique of the new women to sell a lot of unnecessary products to a lot of insecure, passive, frustrated, bored women." Women's participation in consumer culture did not consist of true, authentic selves making autonomous decisions; rather, the compulsion they felt to buy new products served a compensatory function for the true selves they were denied. As the authors put it, "clothing and make-up are not just adornments but expressions of one's very essence; an essence constantly manipulated by the mass media... The real message is Buy, Buy, Buy or you won't be free and you won't have an identity." Both sets of authors—Jaffee

and Dohrn and Goldfield, Munaker, and Booth—found this view most clearly expressed by a cynical market researcher who argued that “women must be liberated to desire new products.” The second group took it a step further, quoting an advertising executive who mused that the self was nothing “but a permanent mode of selection.” Conceiving of the self as a set of costumes that could be put on and taken off at a moment’s notice was as anathema to women’s liberationists as it was to their male leftist counterparts. In a society that truly allowed for individual choice, creativity, and autonomy, Goldfield, Munaker, and Booth argued, people “may love and want certain material objects,” but they wouldn’t “need them for a sense of self.” No product could compensate for the socially-dictated inability to express oneself authentically. Rather, only “a new society in which people work together to determine priorities and ends” could “fill the gap” that led people to participate in consumer culture in the first place.¹⁸ That is, authenticity would become possible only in the context of altered social relations and democratic decision making.

Critics of brainwashing theory nonetheless charged that, while it recognized the structural *causes* of women’s problems, brainwashing theory offered only individual *solutions*, in effect suggesting that women and other oppressed groups should simply be able to choose to end their own oppression. For women, this placed a great deal of emphasis on not conforming to fashion trends or conventional beauty standards and heaped a great deal of judgment on those women who did conform. To women like Ellen Willis and Rosalyn Baxandall, this insistence on the efficacy of opting out of mainstream culture was not only an individualistic fallacy, but also was fraught with class and race

¹⁸ Evelyn Goldfield with Sue Munaker and Heather Booth, “Women in the Radical Movement,” undated (circa 1968-1970), folder 2.43, Women’s Liberation Research Files.

implications. Some women's liberationists challenged their liberal feminist and Beat predecessors, who insisted that women could choose to escape their inauthentic, conventional lives.

In a piece on "'Consumerism' and Women," Ellen Willis pointed out that brainwashing, or consumerism, theory drew on the tradition of Frankfurt School intellectuals, most notably Herbert Marcuse, who argued "that we are psychologically manipulated by the mass media to crave more and more consumer goods, thus powering an economy that depends on constantly expanding sales."¹⁹ According to Willis, many on the left assumed that consumerist theory must be particularly applicable to women—that women must be particularly brainwashed—for the concrete reason that women tended to do more buying than did men. The labor women performed to provide for themselves and their families was put to the same use as women's caretaking and wage work responsibilities: it was proof that they were too tied to banal, material concerns to escape from the inauthentic mass. Willis found fault with this received wisdom, accepted as dogma on the left, on several levels.

First, she argued that consumption was categorically *not* an irrational, self-destructive choice that perpetuated oppression by making one beholden to material objects, but rather was a reasonable response to—indeed, a survival tactic in—an oppressive, hierarchical society. The present state of society, Willis noted, denied individuals autonomous, creative work and authentic personal expression, but it did offer them a powerful bribe: consumption. In the author's words, "under present conditions, people are preoccupied with consumer goods not because they are brainwashed but

¹⁹ Ellen Willis, "'Consumerism' and Women," undated (circa 1968-1970), folder 2.43, Women's Liberation Research Files.

because buying is the one pleasurable activity not only permitted but actively encouraged by the power structure.” More specifically, women’s buying patterns were a response to a system that concentrated wealth and resources in men’s hands and perpetuated women’s dependency. In order to survive, in other words, women needed to attract men; thus,

women are not manipulated by the media into being domestic servants and mindless sexual decorations, the better to sell soap and hair spray. Rather the image reflects women as men in a sexist society force them to behave... In a sense the fashion, cosmetics and ‘feminine hygiene’ ads are aimed more at men than at women. They encourage men to expect women to sport all the latest trappings of sexual slavery—expectations women must then fulfill if they are to survive.²⁰

The unequal distribution of wealth perpetuated by capitalism, Willis argued, made heteronormative dependence the only option for most women. Moreover, both men and women had been trained to see women’s participation in consumer and beauty culture as an aid to achieving a successful heteronormative partnering. “Force[d]...to behave” according to roles that did not truly reflect their inner selves, women’s experiences of inauthenticity thus derived from both material inequality and ideology. In her emphasis on men’s and women’s socialization, Willis did reveal a kinship with brainwashing theory; however, she was quick to point out that women who chose—and, of course, it was nowhere near a free choice—to follow these rules were doing so as a survival tactic.

Second, Willis pointed out that much of women’s consumption was actually a form of labor. Maintaining a conventionally attractive appearance and taking care of one’s home and family were *jobs* that required women to buy clothing, makeup, food, cleaning supplies, and so forth. A woman who spent money on these items was not

²⁰ Ibid.

engaging in “idle self-indulgence,” nor was she brainwashed by “psychic manipulation.” Rather, she was making “a healthy attempt to find outlets for her creative energies within her circumscribed role.”²¹ Fulfilled neither by unpaid domestic labor nor the low-wage work to which most women were restricted, they turned to consumption as the only available (still limiting) avenue of self-expression. If women could not fully express their true, authentic selves, they could at least do the best they could in the roles they were forced to play.

Finally, Willis criticized the conservative individualism of brainwashing theory, which, she argued, allowed elite, white, leftist men to feel superior to women, workers, and people of color while simultaneously eliding the necessity to do anything about the latter groups’ marginalized status. Her words here are worth quoting at some length, for they reveal an explicit awareness of intellectual precedent:

Consumerism [theory] is the outgrowth of an aristocratic, European-oriented anti-materialism based on upper-class resentment [*sic*] against the rise of the vulgar bourgeois. Radical intellectuals have been attracted to this essentially reactionary position (Herbert Marcuse’s view of mass culture is strikingly similar to that of conservative theorists like Ernest Van Den Haag) because it appeals to their dislike of capitalism and their feelings of superiority to the working class. This elitism is evident in radicals’ conviction that they have seen through the system, while the average working slob is brainwashed by the media...Ultimately this point of view leads to a sterile emphasis on individual solution—if only the benighted would reject their ‘plastic’ existence and move to East Village tenements—and the conclusion that people are oppressed because they are stupid or sick. The obnoxiousness of this attitude is compounded by the fact that radicals can only maintain their dropout existence so long as plenty of brainwashed workers keep the economy going.²²

Applied to gender in particular, Willis argued, brainwashing theory perpetuated images of women as irrational, irresponsible, and materialistic. It provided leftist men with a

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

convenient scapegoat—capitalism—on which to blame women’s oppression, allowing them to feel that they themselves were blameless. Finally, it allowed women who had the luxury of choosing to minimize their consumption (because of a socioeconomic status that allowed them to survive independent of men, for example) to feel superior to women who continued to participate in this culture in the same way that it allowed elites to feel superior to “brainwashed” workers. Ultimately, Willis argued, the brainwashing theory espoused by New Left men and some feminists was fundamentally at odds with a women’s liberation movement purporting to espouse collective rather than individual solutions, for it maintained that women could simply choose to escape the inauthentic roles they were forced to play and thus end their own oppression.

In a piece written for the women’s liberation journal *Lilith* in spring 1969, Rosalynn Baxandall made much the same argument. While it was certainly true, she noted, that corporations preyed on women’s insecurities in order to increase sales and profits, it was unfair to argue—as some women’s liberationists did—that women who participated in this culture had simply been duped by capitalism. She saw this argument as a form of victim-blaming: “just because Revlon, Dior, Clairol and Virginia Slims hit women over the head” with advertisements, “do we, Women’s Liberation soul sisters, have to add to these cruel blows, by telling women they are idiots for submitting to these corporations and buying their beauty line? Isn’t this further victimizing the victim?” Moreover, Baxandall (like Willis) emphasized, blaming women who “chose” to consume allowed those able to opt out to feel superior to those who could not. Finally, victim-

blaming glossed over the real (structural) reasons women felt compelled to engage in consumption.²³

By contrast, Baxandall identified myriad reasons for women's consumption, none of which had to do with brainwashing. In part, she argued, women bought for men, either to attract them or, later, to serve as symbols of men's socioeconomic status; in part they bought because they were taken in by marketers' promises of lives magically transformed by the right products. More fundamentally, though, Baxandall believed that "we buy because prior to being solicited we are oppressed, bored, and don't feel capable of being productive or producing anything for ourselves." Frustrated by a system that allowed only the choice between unpaid domestic labor or unfulfilling low-wage work (or, increasingly, a combination of both), women turned to expressing their creativity and individuality through the only avenue available to them: consumption. In Baxandall's view, this was a reasonable response to a society that deprived women of meaningful, fulfilling opportunities, not a sickness or a moral weakness. Or, to put it more succinctly, "We're not fucked up. We're fucked over."²⁴

Baxandall then concluded the piece with a plea to her fellow women's liberationists not to repeat their past mistakes:

Should we direct our energies to exposing and attacking woman the consumer? No, emphatically not. Do we put down those black people who want Cadillacs or flashy threads? No, because when you have nothing, you're vulnerable. If we should do that to our sisters, we'd attack the symptom, consumption, rather than the cause: lack of a productive role, with vicarious living for and through the man. If we are trying to liberate all women from secondary status, dwelling mainly on the consumer aspect just puts women down without insisting on the needed way

²³ Rosalynn Baxandall, "The Woman-as-Konsumer Fetish, Or, Women Aren't Oppressed Because They Buy – They Buy Because They're Oppressed," spring 1969, folder 2.43, Women's Liberation Research Files.

²⁴ Ibid.

forward. The alternative women's role must instead be worked out. It's glib to trot out the inanities of our position again and again, and it only alienates our sisters.²⁵

Like Willis, Baxandall saw the acceptance of brainwashing theory as a damaging strain of individualism in a movement that purported to seek structural solutions to structural problems. Indeed, upon closer examination it turns out that this was one of the fundamental tensions in the women's liberation movement.

The protest of the 1968 Miss America pageant in Atlantic City serves as an example of this tension. Perhaps the best-known action undertaken by women's liberationists (not least for the persistent myths it engendered), the Miss America protest included representatives of pro-choice, pacifist, welfare rights, and professional development groups who leafleted, picketed (including the iconic image of a woman divided into different cuts of meat), and engaged in "guerrilla theater." The protest, of course, is most famous for the "freedom trash can" into which participants and passersby were encouraged to throw "woman-garbage" including "bras, girdles, curlers, false eyelashes, wigs, and representative issues of *Cosmopolitan*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Family Circle*, etc." The goal, however, was not merely to signal disapproval of the pageant. Not only would "reality...liberate the contest auction-block in the guise of 'genyooine' de-plasticized, breathing women," but also, in the words of the protest organizers, "*we will reclaim ourselves for ourselves.*"²⁶

What did this mean? Feminists certainly had many reasons to protest the Miss America pageant. It sorely lacked racial diversity; indeed, a woman of color had never

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ "No More Miss America!," August 22, 1968, folder labeled "Culture," box 8, Women's Liberation Research Files, emphasis in original.

won. The winner, moreover, became a spokesperson for American imperialism through goodwill tours to Vietnam and elsewhere. She also became a “walking commercial” for corporate sponsors such as Pepsi-Cola and Oldsmobile. Too, the pageant flew in the face of the purportedly democratic culture of the United States, making it painfully obvious that while boys could aspire to power, girls could only aspire to beauty. Feminists also objected to the Miss America pageant, however, because it alienated women from their true selves. It was the gruesome apotheosis of “the roles we are all forced to play as women,” most especially the “degrading mindless-boob-girlie symbol.” Miss America, or “Big Sister” (a play on the Orwellian “Big Brother” of 1984 fame), engaged in “thought control” over American women in her “attempts to sear the Image into our mind, to further make women oppressed and men oppressors; to enslave us all the more in high-heeled, low-status roles; to inculcate false values in young girls; to use women as beasts of buying; to seduce us to prostitute ourselves before our own oppression.” The worst aspect of this thought control, however, was the fact that women allowed themselves to be convinced by it: “we women are brain-washed into believing [*sic*] this ourselves!” In the pursuit of this ideal, women lost their own true selves, for they learned from the ideology Miss America represented that “conformity is the key to the crown—and, by extension, to success in our society.”²⁷ However, some of the key architects of this action, including New York activist Carol Hanisch, to whom the initial idea for the protest has been attributed, were quick to insist that her fellow liberationists not make the mistake of blaming the women participating in the pageant, which, like knee-jerk attacks on women who married, had children, wore makeup, and did not work for wages, she found to be counterproductive. As she put it in retrospect,

²⁷ Ibid.

When our group first started, going by majority opinion, we would have been out in the streets demonstrating against marriage, against having babies, for free love, against women who wore makeup, against housewives, for equality without recognition of biological differences, and god knows what else. Now we see all these things as what we call “personal solutionary.” Many of the actions taken by “action” groups have been along these lines. The women who did the anti-woman stuff at the Miss America Pageant were the ones who were screaming for action without theory... We had a lot of conflict in our New York group about whether or not to do action. When the Miss American Protest was proposed there was no question but that we wanted to do it. I think it was because we all saw how it related to *our* lives. We *felt* it was a good action. There were things wrong with the action; but the basic idea was there.²⁸

Like fellow New York Radical Women members Willis and Baxandall, Hanisch believed that participation in beauty and consumer culture was a survival tactic used by women to help navigate an unequal world. “Women,” she wrote, “have developed great shuffling techniques for their own survival (look pretty and giggle to get or keep a job or man) which should be used when necessary until such time as the power of unity can take its place.”²⁹ As she wrote elsewhere, “one of the reasons we came off anti-woman was our lack of clarity. We didn’t say clearly enough that we women are all *forced* to play the Miss America role—not by beautiful women but by men who we have to act that way for and by a system that has so well institutionalized male supremacy for its own ends.”³⁰ In Hanisch’s view, it was in this context that participation in, and protests against, such institutions as the Miss America pageant should be framed and understood. Moreover, as will be discussed below, her insistence that theory not be ignored defined theory not as the overarching ideologies and analyses offered by Marxism and other systems of

²⁸ Carol Hanisch, “The Personal is Political,” undated, folder 1.55, Women’s Liberation Research Files.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Carol Hanisch, quoted in Echols, 95.

thought, but rather as the truths arrived at when groups of women came together to discuss their feelings, experiences, and analyses of the world.

This rejection of conventional theory was one way in which these women's liberationists showed their intellectual debt to the early New Left. They also both drew on and re-worked Students for a Democratic Society's vision of liberation and authentic self-expression through the development of an automated work structure. New York-based activist Shulamith Firestone was one such thinker. As in the SDS blueprint for a post-scarcity, post-work world, Firestone argued in *The Dialectic of Sex* that, for the first time, technology was capable of setting people free from their alienating, dehumanizing labor. Where her analysis differed from that of her male counterparts' was in its recognition of both paid and unpaid labor. The current system, which (ideologically if not in fact) divided men and women into breadwinners and caretakers, kept both groups alienated from their true selves. As Firestone put it, "men and women" alike "developed only half of themselves."³¹ There was no doubt, however, that contemporary society was particularly dehumanizing for women, who, "biologically distinguished from men,...[were] culturally distinguished from 'human'... Women were the slave class that maintained the species in order to free the other half for the business of the world—admittedly often its drudge aspects, but certainly all its creative aspects as well."³² Automation alone was not enough to solve this problem; indeed, its impact on employment (if implemented incorrectly) would be disastrous for women, who would find their pink-collar jobs replaced by machines and their husbands feeling emasculated

³¹ Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1970), 184.

³² Ibid.

by their own replaceability.³³ Rather, two more attendant changes, one technological, one cultural, were needed to turn automation to truly revolutionary ends.

Putting a feminist spin on the Marxist imperative that workers seize the means of production, Firestone demanded that women seize the means of *reproduction*: “just as to assure elimination of economic classes requires the revolt of the underclass (the proletariat) and, in a temporary dictatorship, their seizure of the means of *production*,” she wrote, “so to assure the elimination of sexual classes requires the revolt of the underclass (women) and the seizure of the control of *reproduction*.”³⁴ Through both existing technologies such as the birth control pill and speculative ones such as artificial reproduction, women would be freed from the biological differences that kept them tied to child-bearing and –rearing. Combined with a feminist movement that rejected the logic that motherhood was women’s highest or only calling, cybernetic and reproductive technologies would eliminate women’s dependence on men and both groups’ dependence on the vagaries of a capitalist economy. The economic function of the nuclear family would become obsolete, leaving people free to engage in communal living arrangements in which childcare was shared equally among all adults. Meanwhile, automation would eliminate the housework that consumed so much of women’s time.³⁵ In these ways, technology, though “unnatural,” would actually make people more, not less, human, leaving them free to pursue their true interests and express the true, authentic selves buried deep under the demands of a patriarchal, capitalist society: “the double curse that men should till the soil by the sweat of his brow and that women should bear pain and

³³ Ibid., 183-4.

³⁴ Ibid., 11.

³⁵ Ibid., 210-11.

travail would be lifted through technology to make humane living for the first time a possibility.”³⁶

Firestone was well aware of the charges people would no doubt hurl at her vision of “cybernetic communism.” “We are all familiar,” she wrote, “with the details of Brave New World”:

...cold collectives, with individualism abolished, sex reduced to a mechanical act, children become robots, Big Brother intruding into every aspect of private life, rows of babies fed by impersonal machines, eugenics manipulated by the state, genocide of cripples and retards for the sake of a super-race created by white-coated technicians, all emotion considered weakness, love destroyed, and so on.³⁷

Yet, she felt that this dystopian future was more likely to arise from the current system, in which “masculine” qualities such as stoicism, competitiveness, and self-interest were celebrated and “feminine” qualities such as emotion, cooperation, and nurturance were denigrated and in which technology remained under the control of the wealthy and the powerful. The specter of *1984*, she argued, “grows directly out of, signifying an exaggeration of, the evils of our present male-dominated system.”³⁸ In this way, Firestone’s vision not only added the issue of unpaid work to her male counterparts’ cybernetic vision, but also reversed the gendered logic of totalitarianism, which held that women were more susceptible to its influence.³⁹

Firestone’s ideas also made their way into literature, where such novels as Marge Piercy’s 1976 *Woman on the Edge of Time* combined a faith in the liberating potential of

³⁶ Ibid., 10, 184.

³⁷ Ibid., 188.

³⁸ Ibid., 188-9.

³⁹ Unfortunately, Firestone was less successful in breaking away from the condescending racial views promulgated by her radical male contemporaries, conceiving of racism only as “sexism extended” and imagining a (somewhat Freudian) “family of man” comprised of white parents and African-American children. Ibid., 97-9.

automation with a condemnation of one of the social institutions most hated by the women's liberation movement, the psychiatric establishment.⁴⁰ Like Tennessee Williams, some women's liberationists singled out the institutions of psychiatry and psychotherapy with a singular intensity, charging that their definition of "health" relied upon women abandoning their own authentic truth and adjusting to and ultimately accepting the limited roles they had the opportunity to play. In encouraging conformity to social norms, these liberationists charged, psychiatrists and psychotherapists advanced individual solutions to social problems. As one irate group of women put it, "the prevalence of psychotherapy in American life is...working to stabilize oppression by reconciling women to their condition."⁴¹ Indeed, as historian Mari Jo Buhle has pointed out, there is a great deal of evidence to suggest that women's liberationists were on solid ground in making these assertions, as postwar psychiatrists such as Marynia Farnham, with co-author Ferdinand Lundberg, argued that women were unhappy merely because they had not properly adjusted to their "proper" roles in the home.⁴²

⁴⁰ The novel follows the story of Connie, a poor Mexican-American woman whose discriminatory and abusive treatment at the hands of the psychiatric establishment is contrasted with imaginative forays into a future, egalitarian utopia. Marge Piercy, *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976; repr., New York: Ballantine Books, 1997).

⁴¹ Ellen Cantarow, Elizabeth Diggs, Katherine Ellis, Janet Marx, Lillian Robinson, and Muriel Schien, "I am Furious (Female)," undated, Students for a Democratic Society Papers, series 4B, no. 168.

⁴² Ferdinand Lundberg and Marynia F. Farnham, *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1947; Mari Jo Buhle, *Feminism and Its Discontents: A Century of Struggle with Psychoanalysis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998). Not all feminists had negative experiences with or perceptions of psychotherapy, however. For example, a women's liberation group in New Haven, Connecticut, put out a pamphlet titled "Your Rights as a Woman in Therapy" based on their "belief in the potential of good therapy as well as our knowledge that not all therapies have provided this kind of experience." The member who contributed a personal statement to the pamphlet believed that therapy could provide many of the same rewards as could consciousness raising—greater awareness of feelings ("when I began therapy I did not know what a 'feeling' was," the author remarked), uncovering processes of socialization, etc. She did believe, however, that it was possible to *recover*, which, because it interpreted a social phenomenon (patriarchy) as a personal problem (illness) with an individual solution, would have been anathema to most liberationists. Personal Statement by "A Sister," pamphlet, "Your Rights as a Woman in Therapy," undated, folder 3.33, Women's Liberation Research Files.

Nicole Anthony was one women's liberationist whose experiences hewed closely to this model. First drawn to counseling because she was unhappy as a housewife, her psychiatrist told her that "after therapy, I would be happy to stay at home and be a 'woman,' happy to serve my husband and children." He also initiated physical contact that made her feel uncomfortable; when she protested, he insisted that she did so only because of her desire to sleep with her father. This refusal to accept Anthony's own interpretations of her experiences became a pattern in her relationship with her psychiatrist, and indeed was the most fundamental problem women's liberationists had with the institution as a whole. Anthony's doctor, for example, believed that women were raped because they had a subconscious desire to be raped. He gave her the diagnosis of a "super-thin membrane": "The good doctor carefully explained how I had a super-thin membrane separating my conscious and unconscious thoughts, likening me to a borderline schizophrenic. Since my thin membrane made me think things were real when they weren't, my perceptions of reality must be suspect." In other words, Anthony's own interpretations of her experiences and emotions were not to be trusted. Exposure to the women's liberation movement allowed Anthony to draw the following conclusions about the true intentions of such diagnoses:

The psychiatric profession is built on the slavery of women. Oppressive definitions of woman underlie all of its theory and most of its practice. When a woman protests the slave-servant role she is labeled mentally ill....The job of the psychiatrist has been to help us adjust to our oppression by once and for all laying the blame completely on our manipulated and oppressed "psyches." In fact our psyches have nothing to do with what's happening.⁴³

Anthony eventually terminated her therapy.

⁴³ Nicole Anthony, "An Open Letter to Psychiatrists," undated [1973-1974], folder 3.33, Women's Liberation Research Files.

Similarly, Redstockings member Lynn O'Connor minced no words in laying bare psychotherapy's oppressive nature. Like the burning of witches, she argued, therapy was a way of silencing women who dared to protest the status quo. Indeed, she believed that "the so called science of psychology is one of the most pernicious forms of chauvinist thought ever. Driving us into private cells, the psychological mind fuck brings the bars of our prison so close to each of us that we become completely paralyzed. It assumes that there is an 'instinctive' or 'natural' way to feel and behave, and proceeds to explain that people who act in some way different from what is natural...are sick, and should be changed." It was, moreover, a system that allowed men to collude with other men in order to preserve their power; as O'Connor put it, "the convenience of such a system is obvious. A woman rebels against her owner. He sends her to one of his allies, a professional ideologue who specializes in cures for rebellious slaves. He informs the woman of the costs of rebellion, perhaps a lengthy stay in a hospital. Only the most obstinate rebel sticks to her guns under such a threat." Psychotherapy thus perpetuated women's oppression in at least three ways: by dismissing their subjective emotional reality as sickness; by ignoring the conditions that led to this "sickness"; and by punishing those who rejected psychiatric authority.⁴⁴

In addition to equating women's frustrations with sickness and adjustment to oppressive conditions with health, therapy also divided women from one another much in the same way critics of brainwashing theory charged its proponents did. Barbara Susan, another Redstockings member, did not have an entirely negative experience with therapy; indeed, she gained a great deal of confidence from it. As she put it, therapy "helped me develop a sense of self worth and come to the understanding that I wasn't a bad person or

⁴⁴ Lynn O'Connor, undated [1970], folder 1.46, Women's Liberation Research Files.

useless.” This increased confidence led to greater care paid to her physical appearance and, concomitantly, more attention from men. However, as this care and attention waned, Susan began to realize that

therapy had neglected a very important part of my education. It hadn’t made clear to me that anything was wrong with the social and economic conditions in which we live. It had only made clear that I hadn’t adapted to them in a way that would be useful to me. It hadn’t made clear that the relationships which cause us to have problems are in large measure predetermined by a political atmosphere and that the present political atmosphere is destructive. Therapy had made me believe that I was different from other women (in this case different meant better)...In retrospect therapy had separated me from my sisters by calling them “most women” and me “special.”⁴⁵

Susan recoiled from the message that she could simply *choose* to end her own oppression—a message that neglected to consider social realities—and from her isolation from other women.

An anonymous Redstockings member made this implied connection between psychotherapy and brainwashing theory even more explicit. As manifested in the approaches of the psychiatric/psychological community, brainwashing theory went beyond the ways in which even members of the feminist community sometimes blamed other women for wearing makeup, getting married, having children, insisting on fidelity, and “accepting” lower wages. It granted scientific and intellectual authority to the belief that women themselves were to blame for their continued subordination. As this author put it, “the field of psychology has always been used to substitute personal explanations of problems for political ones, and to disguise real material oppression as emotional disturbance. Lacking a political analysis of their situation people often have no choice

⁴⁵ Barbara Susan, “About My Consciousness Raising,” undated [1968-1970s], folder 1.29, Women’s Liberation Research Files.

but to blame themselves for their unhappiness. Psychology perpetuates this self-blame by translating it into social science jargon and giving it respectability.” Freudian models of female passivity had been replaced by what to this author was an equally insidious view: the idea that women’s early socialization was *solely* to blame for their problems. This perspective ignored the very real social mechanisms that punished women for stepping out of line by insisting that, in order to end their oppression, women needed merely to heal their “damaged” minds. As this author put it, “to call a woman brainwashed is a subtle way of calling her stupid. It implies that we aren’t capable of telling the difference between television scenes and real life; that if our oppression were suddenly removed we wouldn’t know it but would go on acting as if it was still there. It implies that there are enclaves in society where male supremacy doesn’t exist, where women could act in a liberated way if we only understood we were free. It advocates individual psychological struggle at a time when collective struggle is essential.” Ultimately, brainwashing theory blamed women for not choosing to liberate themselves. Women’s liberationists, by contrast, believed that authentic self-liberation and self-expression could only be attained in the context of changed social relations.⁴⁶

If consumer culture and psychiatry/psychotherapy were singled out as particularly insidious agents of oppression, the women’s liberationists discussed here also identified subtler processes of socialization. To be sure, even those liberationists who criticized brainwashing theory were aware that socialization *did* affect women; indeed, laying bare

⁴⁶ A Redstockings Sister, “Brainwashing and Women: The Psychological Attack,” undated [1970], folder 1.46, Women’s Liberation Research Files. It also bears mentioning that this author was attuned to the ways in which races and class divided women. As she put it, “talk about brainwashing ensures domination of the feminist movement by college-educated white women: the majority of women whose struggle we must join (welfare mothers, black and brown women fighting for their liberation, working women and housewives) are too involved in concrete matters of survival to listen to mystical abstraction about damaged psyches or internalized images. Psychology, in addition to analyzing the problem incorrectly, is also a class weapon.”

the ways in which this socialization took place comprised one of the main goals of the movement. However, their analysis did not end there. As with their feminist critique of psychiatry/psychotherapy above, liberationists also responded to the ways in which their own subjective realities—their emotional responses to a given set of facts—were deemed petty, irrational, or, from male sources within the New Left, bourgeois. In turn they developed a theory that made emotion and experience the measures of truth. In this way, of course, women’s liberationists also drew on the early ideas of the very SDS men who dismissed their concerns.

In “Female Schizophrenia,” Meredith Tax, a member of the Boston-based socialist feminist organization Bread and Roses, made clear the extent to which women had been alienated from their true selves and forced to adopt certain roles. Women, she argued, “have been *molded* into these deformed postures, *pushed* into these service jobs, *made* to apologize for existing, *taught* to be unable to do anything requiring any strength. We have been told to be stupid, to be silly.” As opposed to boys, who were taught that “they will be loved even if they make messes, stay out late without phoning, get dirty, and act like brats,” a female child learned that “she must be pretty and sweet; she must be loveable; she mustn’t make messes or play rough; she must perform services for Mommy and Daddy and be useful.” This training, moreover, left women reliant on others for a sense of identity. A girl was “deprived of a sense of herself (ego), the sense of having an identity separate from other people’s evaluations of her...girls are taught to see themselves as *objects* rather than subjects.” It was this lack of a core identity that Tax called female schizophrenia, a condition that left many women “so systematically deprived of an ego that they must constantly refer to a mirror, to their physical presence,

to reassure themselves that they are actually there, still in one piece.” Female schizophrenia was not, however, a form of insanity or irrationality. It was rather a reasonable yet unfortunate response to real, oppressive conditions. The pain of dealing with sexual harassment, for example, led women to adopt “a split between mind and body[,] between one self and another,” while economic dependence forced women “to faithfully play the parts of sister, daughter, wife, mother and lover. . . . A woman must, in order to make it as a woman, reflect the desires and preconceptions of every man who has power over her.” Recognizing the reality of one’s situation, moreover, was not enough to change it; although “many women see that these are a collection of roles,” their ego-less socialization was so complete that “the face behind the shifting masks is a mystery even to themselves.” In short, deprived of any opportunity to develop autonomous, authentic selves, women became consummate performers: “women have to *play* at being themselves—that is, their nice selves, the selves made to order on standard patterns.” While men could simply be, women had to act.⁴⁷

Fellow Boston-area women’s liberationist Dana Densmore, a member of the group Cell 16, mounted a similar critique. Women, she argued, had been trained to see themselves as objects rather than as human beings. This “temptation to be a beautiful object,” or narcissism, was really a hatred of and dissociation from the authentic self. As Densmore argued, the joy women felt at finding an acceptable image in the mirror was relief that the “ugliness” of “the familiar, plain, troublesome self” had been successfully

⁴⁷ At the same time, women’s liberationists, like their male counterparts, placed a great deal of importance on the *expression* (as opposed to the inner possession) of authenticity, suggesting that their philosophy, like that of SDS, left room for a distinction between acting, which was seen as false, and performing, which was seen as an authentic form of expression. Meredith Tax, “Female Schizophrenia,” undated [1969-1975], folder 1.2, Women’s Liberation Research Files. Alternately, this essay also appeared as Meredith Tax, “Woman and Her Mind: The Story of Everyday Life,” undated [c. 1968-1970], folder 2.43, Women’s Liberation Research Files.

covered up. The more outsiders believed that this beautiful object was the true self, the more successful was the woman. Yet, it was a self-destructive success, for “that beautiful object we stand in awe before has nothing to do with the person we know so well, it is altogether outside, separate, object, a beautiful image, not a person at all.” The true self, by contrast, was “the soul, the personality...something strange and human and very familiar and of this earth.” Yet, the need to transcend this messy subjectivity was so pervasive that only in escape could women find a kind of (albeit temporary) relief. “Only as we slip into the schizophrenic world of play-acting and narcissism,” Densmore argued, “will we be able to enjoy the beauty we create.” Such strategies, though, were ultimately self-defeating, as “then we will be imprisoned within the walls of the object we created in the minds of others and in our own minds—we will no longer be able to function as persons, or only fitfully, self-consciously, and puzzling others by our strange behavior.”⁴⁸

When women came to think of themselves only in terms of the roles they were forced to play, they gave up their authentic human-ness. Being forced to play a role, that is, was *very* different from the opportunity to express one’s true self—the understanding of performance discussed in the previous chapter and implicitly advocated by women’s liberationists themselves.

Indeed, distinguishing between roles and selves was a key aspect of the liberationist critique of women’s socialization. For example, a poem tellingly titled “A Work of Artifice” described women as bonsai trees in need of constant grooming: “With living creatures / we must begin very early / to dwarf their growth: / the bound feet, / the

⁴⁸ Dana Densmore, “Sex Roles and Female Oppression,” undated [1968-1972], folder 1.10, Women’s Liberation Research Files.

crippled brain, / the hair in curlers.”⁴⁹ In part, this perspective derived from the Marxist influence on the movement: economic classes became the hierarchical roles assigned to men and women. Less obviously but more interestingly, however, this distinction also drew on the pervasive postwar distinction, discussed throughout this dissertation, between repression/conformity and freedom/self-expression. A member of the New York City-based group, The Feminists, made this clear in an interesting article titled “Conceptual Analysis.” The “role system,” as this author termed it, was the process by which powerful groups “denie[d] the humanity of the Oppressed.” While many different “role systems” existed, gender or sex roles came first, and thus served as the model for subsequent divisions. Women were therefore both “the first class to be separated out from humanity and thus denied their humanity” and the example used to deny the humanity of other oppressed groups. Accordingly, “because the male-female system is primary, the freedom of every oppressed individual depends upon the freeing of every individual from every aspect of the male-female system.” In contrast to the inauthentic roles women were forced to play, freedom consisted of “the most basic right of every individual is to create the terms of its own definition.” As this belief manifested itself in consciousness-raising groups, however, women created the terms of their own definition collectively, not as individuals.⁵⁰

Marilyn Salzman Webb, an SDS veteran active in women’s liberation networks in Washington, D.C., took the criticism of women’s reification one step further, arguing that women were turned not only into objects, but also into commodities (a slight

⁴⁹ “A Work of Artifice,” undated, folder 2.42, Women’s Liberation Research Files. The poem was published in the collection “Woman to Woman: A Book of Poems and Drawings by Women.”

⁵⁰ “Conceptual Analysis,” July 15, 1969, folder 1.28, Women’s Liberation Research Files.

variation, too, on the feminist critique of consumer culture). Not only did women bear the brunt of responsibility for domestic labor, not only were they trained to be “submissive” and “ladylike” and to think of themselves as “incapable of intellectual thought... feather-headed, frivolous, and infantile,” but they also were trained by capitalism to assign market value to their femininity. Concomitant to a system that mandated buying beauty products was the fact that “a market economy based on personal manipulation has a dehumanizing and desexualizing effect because it forces us to see ourselves as objects to be adorned in the current mode for sexual appreciation and ‘sale.’” In the commercialized world of heteronormative exchange, “we are forced to view ourselves as objects to be ‘sold’ sexually.”⁵¹

Other feminists applied this same critique of socialization to organized religion. In a piece on the Catholic Church, for example, writer Mary Beth Tisera wrote that “by wearing the mask and incorporating the self imposed upon the Catholic, ethnic female,” a woman became not only masochistic, but also “*alienated from her deepest self*. She comes to believe herself to be what man tells her she is. She believes that docility, submissiveness, suffering are natural to her sex and views these qualities in a positive manner. She is trapped and her entrapment is perpetuated because she never questions the propriety of this 'other' reality.”⁵²

Along with these realizations about how inauthentic conformity was enforced came the determination that existing “political” theories were inadequate to describe or

⁵¹ Marilyn Salzman Webb, “Towards a Radical Women’s Movement,” February 1968, series 3, no. 197, Students for a Democratic Society Papers. The article was originally published in the *Washington Free Press*.

⁵² Mary Beth Tisera, “Mary Was a Masochist: Human Sexuality and the Church,” undated [1971-1976], folder 2.23, Women’s Liberation Research Files, emphasis in original.

explain the reality of women's lives. Although many white women's liberationists defined themselves as Marxist or socialist feminists, for example, they were quick to point out that Marxism alone failed fully to capture their experiences. Rather, they felt that any attempt to intellectualize or theorize oppression would inevitably marginalize the insights that could be gleaned from women's actual experiences. As members of the Berkeley-Oakland Women's Union argued, male Marxist theorists had, in their emphasis on people's public lives, neglected to analyze what went on inside the home, and thus their analysis remained at the abstract level. Women's liberationists, by contrast, sought to "consider both people's subjective experience and their public lives... We think that women will move towards making a revolution through an analysis of the oppression we experience—not through a moral or abstract intellectual commitment to socialism."⁵³

In large part, these frustrations with theorizing and intellectualizing grew out of women's experiences in male-dominated New Left groups such as SDS. Many women's liberationists had firsthand experience with the increasingly black-and-white morality of SDS, which wrote off as invalid experiences that did not fit into their (Marxist or otherwise) models of the world. As the organization grew more militant in the late 1960s, its humanism waned; moreover, the philosophy of white, male SDS leaders had always left room to invalidate those experiences that did not comport with their own vision of truth. Indeed, Bread and Roses members Linda Gordon and Meredith Tax, both of whom were veterans of the male-dominated anti-war movement, went so far as to argue that conventional political activism required its participants to give up their humanity and become single-minded, purpose-driven machines without emotions or

⁵³ Berkeley-Oakland Women's Union, "Berkeley-Oakland Women's Union: Principles of Unity," 1975, folder 1.1, Women's Liberation Research Files.

desires external to furthering the movement. According to Gordon and Tax, “the traditional movement stereotype” of a full-time political activist “is a kind of political machine.” Devoting all of his time and energy to organizing, he eschewed sleep, hobbies, and connections with other human beings. As they described him, “he has no friends—that is, there is no one to whom he truly opens his heart, although he may complain to his wife or girlfriend. Perhaps he never looks into his heart at all.” In conclusion, “it’s no kind of life for a human being.”⁵⁴

Moreover, these male movement impresarios demanded the same degree of purity from all members of the organization, while simultaneously refusing to share in movement leadership. As Gordon and Tax put it, “sometimes it seems like we all gave up what makes us most human when we went into the movement.” Pressured to give up hobbies deemed bourgeois or counter-revolutionary, women were expected to subsume their individual identities and passions to the larger good—a larger good that they were often not able to share in. These “power brokers of the left,” recognizable by “their competitiveness among themselves; their verbal diarrhea; the way they intellectualize everything and hardly ever say anything that isn’t totally abstract; [and] the way they never talk about themselves or their feelings except when under attack,” were happiest when their followers accepted their dictums without question and “their” women were engaged primarily in “shitwork.”⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Linda Gordon and Meredith Tax, “Life in the Movement” (Part One), 1970, folder 1.6, Women’s Liberation Research Files.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

Interestingly, what Gordon and Tax singled out as the most egregious sin committed by movement leaders was their utter inability to link experiences and theories, themselves and their politics:

The way (and length) they talk, the way they move, their organizing style, are all ways they exhibit their baroque excesses of their individual egos. They view their own egos with reverence, as the repository of “leadership qualities,” and act as if their *actions* had no connection with their *selves*. They will say, when criticized, “I agree I made a mistake, but why do you have to attack me *personally*?” They think people should like them no matter what they do, and it is bad politics not to like them. They can never stay in any group that they cannot dominate, and they have no notion of what it means to act collectively... This kind of individualism is the center of the left.⁵⁶

It is no surprise, then, that Gordon and Tax felt with a great deal of urgency the need “to create a movement that people can live in, that won’t drive them crazy with its impossible standards of purity, with its rapid alterations of line and its inhumanity.” Contra the abstract theorizing that had come to dominate the male-dominated left in the late 1960s, women’s liberation sought to be a human- and experience-centered movement. “We have learned,” Gordon and Tax wrote, “that the surest antidote to rhetoric is speaking out of one’s experiences.”⁵⁷

A member of a New York-based women's liberation group described similarly frustrating experiences with New Left men. A meeting scheduled to discuss feminism quickly turned into “a 3 hour confrontation between them and me,” a confrontation that was moreover “loaded with jargon from the new left which I cannot reproduce...what it actually was was them speaking new leftese and me stumbling along in tattered bits sometimes trying to use their terms but every time I did I was accused of using them

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

incorrectly and plain English was no good since they would translate it into new leftese and I couldn't even know if they did it accurately or not.” Unable to accept the author's experiences in her own words and on her own terms, young male radicals felt compelled to over-theorize and over-intellectualize it. This young woman was particularly saddened by the women (the “politicos” in the feminist-politico split that pitted those who wished to organize separately from those who wanted to keep working within the male-dominated left) who remained loyal to the male New Left's interpretation of the world. These politicos, she argued, suffered from a “mind-body split.” Like Gordon's and Tax's description of the leaders who refused to see their politics as connected to their personal lives, this author described a woman who “complained...that the trouble with W.L. [women's liberation] was that it was changing her as a person and her political life and her personal life were merging.” Although this was, of course, one of the key goals of women's liberation, politicos were “determined to never let that happen.” In order to obtain a modicum of acceptance from male leftist leaders, they had given up parts of their identities. “Movement women,” as this writer put it, “seem to suffer from a form of oppression in which they are allowed to be movement so long as they reject everything traditionally 'feminine'—especially emotions—and exist only on an intellectual level. I think this is a disease pressed on them by men who all suffer from it anyway.” In this view, the theorizing and intellectualizing of the New Left was an inherently anti-woman project, for it deemed “feminine” emotions as outside of the political process.⁵⁸ This rejection of emotion also revealed just how much the movement had changed since the

⁵⁸ “Report of a Meeting of SDS Members (and Me),” undated, folder 1.27, Women's Liberation Research Files.

days of the Port Huron Statement, when Tom Hayden and others argued for the validity of an emotion-based politics.

Written by Judy Henderson, a member of the Atlanta, Georgia, group the Lesbian Feminist Alliance, “On Integrating the Personal and Political” combined an emphasis on socialization and an emphasis on the limits of theorizing. Indeed, she believed that it was in laying bare the processes of socialization that theory became useful. Like Tax and others, Henderson saw women being trained from an early age to derive their self-image not from an internal sense of value but rather from how others perceived them. Confronted with the “authoritarianism” first of their parents and later of larger social institutions, women—even from infancy—experienced a form of “self-alienation” that left them unable to express their authentic selves and forced to conform to the limited roles available to them. Yet, existing political theories were inadequate either to explain how this occurred or to combat the deleterious effects of this “inhuman system of social relationships.” Arguing for “theory as a felt process,” Henderson insisted that “any ideological text, whether it’s Marx or Wordsworth, needs to be continually interpreted in terms of complex individual experience to have *any* meaning.” Theory was only useful, in other words, if it was constantly being evaluated against the reality of people’s lives and experiences, for in these experiences—painful though they were—lay the key to effective political engagement. “This general alienation,” Henderson argued, “is somewhere the bare skeleton of what there is in any person to be politicized, released, helped.”⁵⁹ If people could recognize and talk about the processes that brought about their

⁵⁹ Judy Henderson, “On Integrating the Personal and Political,” undated, folder 3.34, Women’s Liberation Research Files.

self-alienation, they could begin to recover from it, in the process re-claiming their authentic selves.

At times, the attention white women's liberationists paid to their own socialization led them to dabble in a kind of racial primitivism, arguing that revolutionary or "third-world" women in places like Cuba and Vietnam led lives more authentic than their own. However, they approached this subject with more self-conscious ambivalence than did their male counterparts. Marilyn Salzman Webb was one of the main proponents of the "third-world analogy," the idea that the position of women *vis-à-vis* men in the United States was comparable to the relationship between colonized and colonizer nations. Drawing on Frantz Fanon's anti-imperialism, for example, she argued that women were to men as the colonized Algerians were to the ruling French. She also borrowed from Fanon to point out that, as "the French...[were] equally victimized because they were the colonizers of the oppressed colonized, women see men as caught in a common oppression."⁶⁰ As noted in previous chapters, Fanon also wrote of the inauthenticity colonialism imposed upon the colonized. Like their male counterparts, white women in the liberation movement appropriated this argument in ways that Fanon did not intend.

Webb also heaped praise on the women of Vietnam, whom she and many others saw as winning their equality through participation in the anti-imperialist struggle. She quoted approvingly National Liberation Front theorists who argued that "the struggle of [Vietnamese] women for freedom and equality could not but identify with the common struggle for national liberation...woman has won her equality in law and in fact only

⁶⁰ Marilyn Salzman Webb, "Towards a Radical Women's Movement," February, 1968, series 3, no. 122, Students for a Democratic Society Papers. The piece was published in the *Washington Free Press*.

because she participates in the social and political struggle and in production work...The Vietnamese woman has literally won her equality with a weapon in her hand and through the sheer strength of her arms.” Importantly, she saw in their actions, as well as those of the African-American civil rights movement, a model for white American women to follow. She wrote that “we, as radical political people, have learned...from the Vietnamese women and from black people...that the only way we can be fully effective as a political force is by building our own movement that allows us to develop ourselves personally, politically, and as a power base that is to be respected.”⁶¹

To their credit, not all white women's liberationists were convinced by the romanticization and appropriation inherent in the third-world analogy, although their very criticisms recreated aspects of the ideas they were attempting to challenge. Writing in direct response to Webb, for example, Judith Brown, cofounder of Gainesville Women's Liberation, pointed out that nationalist revolutions did not often function as the panacea that women would hope. In Cuba, perhaps the example most heralded by male leftists, the Castro regime wanted women to “go home, cook, take care of the kids.” “What's the hang-up with Cuba?,” Brown asked, “men still run it their own way, for their own ends.”⁶² Interestingly, besides the tacit approval of conservative gender norms it implied, what Brown found most upsetting about male leftists' fascination with Cuba and other such examples was its performative, inauthentic nature:

The third world analogy has caused plenty of trouble in the radical male left. Looking to revolutionary movements in underdeveloped countries has encouraged a sort of one-upmanship [and] desperation to act; and, much to its detriment, the

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Judith Brown, “Toward a Female Liberation Movement,” Part II, 1968, series 3, no. 122, Students for a Democratic Society Papers. Part I of the piece was written by fellow Gainesville, Florida, activist Beverly Jones.

left usually only mimics in what are essentially theatrical performances, the real-life blood and guts scenes of revolutionary moments in action.⁶³

In this way, Brown claimed a position of authority, granting herself the right to decide what was authentic and what was not. Yet, in arguing that male leftists were only *pretending* to be what “real” revolutionaries really *were*, she also engaged in the problematic racial politics that granted greater authenticity to marginalized “third world” subjects.

Brown found the Vietnam analogy equally inappropriate. Quite simply, the middle-class, white women who made up this strand of women's liberation were not facing the daily threat of death and dismemberment as were Vietnamese women. Following the Vietnamese model of attaining gender equality through participation in nationalist struggle would not translate to an American context, for the nationalist goal of the U.S. was imperial domination. As Brown put it, “Marilyn [Webb] tells us that Vietnamese women found out that the only way they can get equality is to participate in the national political struggle. The strict analogy between Viet Nam and the United States is more realistically phrased: American women would get a lot more equality if they gave militant support to our *national* struggle: to colonize, to murder, to enslave.” Brown explicitly opposed that route. Yet, she did echo Webb in finding a “proper third world analogy” in the “eerie, high pitched wail of the Algerian women.” “That,” she wrote, “is already our own.”⁶⁴ Brown’s seemingly contradictory embrace of this third-world analogy may have been a reference to the technique American women developed

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

to interrupt and have their voices heard at SDS meetings by echoing this “high pitched wail.”

At times, the feminist embrace of “primitive” cultures as more authentic than their own was connected to a broader critique of capitalism. Interestingly, these criticisms also linked women’s liberationists to Richard Schechner. In different cultures, liberationists argued, both arts and crafts were parts of people's everyday lives. Crafts had obvious material uses, while art “was part of peoples [*sic*] natural and supernatural world i.e. Egyptian tombs with engraving picture decorations. Art was part of [a] magic symbolic religious world. Art had aim in itself.” However, the development of capitalist markets turned art into a commodity, ultimately a fetish, and the mass production of goods once created by hand destroyed the use-value of women's crafts and denigrated it in relation to male “art.” These circumstances fostered three different forms of alienation. First, the demands of markets meant that people were separated from the fruits of their labor, which were to be sold at a profit for capitalists (not the creators themselves). Second, individuals were not able to determine the form or substance of their creations, for the profit motive demanded uniform products. In this way, the “creative initiative” that allowed artists and craftspeople to produce goods with a connection to their inner selves and/or specific, individual material needs became “rote labor” designed to produce uniform goods as quickly and cheaply as possible. Creative expression was thus “homogenized and merchandized.” Finally, the mass production of crafts alienated (isolated) individual producers from one another; in this way it had an “anti human species potential” that removed the possibility of connection to and support from fellow

producers. Artists were thus “alone [and] anxiety ridden,” beholden to the tastes of “communities [that] exerted stifling conformity.”⁶⁵

For women in particular, the mass production of crafts meant the destruction of a potential culture of resistance to male control. In part, this was due to the power and respect women of certain groups, for example the native peoples of North America, were perceived by liberationists to derive from their control of crafts such as needlework. By contrast, in European and Euro-American cultures, the very pettiness ascribed to women's art made it a useful way to send messages or make political statements unbeknownst to men. For example, women who supported the American Revolution would at times include patriotic symbols in the very quilts under which their British Loyalist husbands slept. Crafts thus allowed women to voice “their political beliefs at a time they were not allowed to vote.” More abstractly, crafts allowed for women's “spiritual survival,” which depended on “harboring memories.” That is, each product “was a reminder of its place in a womans [*sic*] life, similar to an entry in a journal or a diary.” Liberationists thus imagined a past in which an authentic women's culture allowed for greater individual self-expression, paving the way for the cultural feminism that would emerge in the 1970s.

Consciousness Raising and the Politics of Experience

The women's liberationists discussed here did not invent consciousness raising out of whole cloth; indeed, it had precedents in several unexpected pockets of postwar culture and society, including anti-totalitarian theory's emphasis on the expression of individual truth as the key to staving off authoritarianism; humanistic psychology's equation of self-actualization and authenticity; Tennessee Williams's theory of

⁶⁵ “On Handicraft,” undated, folder 3.5, Women's Liberation Research Files.

spectatorship; and female Beats' attempts to write their own experiences and emotions into the culture of authenticity. More immediately, the women's liberation movement received conflicting messages about the importance of personal experience from the white, male leadership of the New Left. On the face of it, for example, the well-known 1967 speech by then-SDS president Greg Calvert, "In White America: Radical Consciousness and Social Change," would seem a ringing endorsement of the techniques women's liberationists used to connect emotions, experiences, and politics. The beginning of the speech described how Guatemalan guerrillas won peasants to their cause:

It is said that when the Guatemalan guerrillas enter a new village, they do not talk about the "anti-imperialist struggle" nor do they give lessons on dialectical materialism—neither do they distribute copies of the "Communist Manifesto" or of Chairman Mao's "On Contradiction." What they do is gather together the people of the village in the center of the village and then, one by one, the guerrillas rise and talk to the villagers about their own lives: about how they see themselves and how they came to be who they are, about their deepest longings and the things they've striven for and hoped for, about the way in which their deepest longings were frustrated by the society in which they live. Then the guerrillas encourage the villagers to talk about their lives. And then a marvelous thing begins to happen. People who thought that their problems and frustrations were their individual problems discover that their problems and longings are all the same—that no man is any different than the others... And, finally, that out of the discovery of their common humanity comes the decision that men must unite together in the struggle to destroy the conditions of their common oppression.⁶⁶

In other words, existing political theories were inadequate to explain the realities of people's lives or to incite them to political action. Rather, only sharing personal experiences—and realizing that perceived personal problems were actually structural problems—could unite people to bring about social change. Calvert intended these ideas

⁶⁶ Greg Calvert, "In White America: Radical Consciousness and Social Change," 1967, series 3, no. 4, Students for a Democratic Society Papers. Best known for its theory of the "new working class," which posited students, not workers, as the instruments of radical social change, the speech was originally given at a Radical Education Project conference held at Princeton University in February of that year (see chapter five).

to be the basis of the “new radicalism” that SDS would espouse, and it is striking the degree to which the process sounds like a primer on feminist consciousness raising. Yet, experience would prove differently, with male leftists wasting no time (and seeing no irony) in deriding these practices as petty when engaged in by American women. As in the quote that began this chapter, women found that, as far as men of Calvert’s cohort were concerned, “when women get together to study and analyze their own experience it means they are sick but when Chinese peasants or Guatemalan guerillas get together and use the identical method they are revolutionary.”⁶⁷ Consciousness raising thus served as a corrective to both the political theories that ignored and the politicians who derided women’s own experiences. It also distinguished between the *roles* forced on women by society and, in terms reminiscent of the collapse between performance and authenticity described in the previous chapter, the *selves* that were expressed or performed in front of an audience of fellow group members.

In an examination of consciousness raising, it is useful to begin with two oft-cited, but rarely fully limned, contributions from civil rights movement veterans and New York Radical women members. A longtime participant in women's groups in both New York City and Gainesville, Florida, Carol Hanisch described in “The Personal Is Political” the incompatibility leftists often saw in the debate referred to interchangeably as “‘therapy’ vs. ‘therapy and politics’” and “‘personal’ vs. ‘political.’” It was incorrect, she argued, to assume that women's groups were therapy groups. As she put it, “therapy assumes that someone is sick and that there is a cure, e.g. a personal solution. I am greatly offended that I or any other woman is thought to *need* therapy in the first place. Women are messed over, not messed up!” Instead, “we need to change the objective

⁶⁷ Redstockings, “Resistances to Consciousness,” 1969, folder 1.29, Women’s Liberation Research Files.

conditions, not adjust to them.” According to Hanisch, women's groups were the first step in affecting this change, for in such groups individual members began to see patterns in their and others' experiences and thus to understand the objective conditions structuring their lives. A veteran of the male-dominated left, Hanisch received from conscious-raising meetings “a political understanding which all my reading, all my 'political discussions,' all my four-odd years in the movement never gave me.” For this reason, Hanisch believed that women's groups functioned as a kind of “political therapy,” something “the whole country needs.” To her the most important aspect of political therapy was “getting rid of self-blame.” She hoped that “women, blacks, and workers” could “stop blaming ourselves for our sad situations.” Understanding the very real mechanisms that caused and perpetuated their oppression was a necessary part of this political therapy. Moreover, Hanisch argued that existing political theories were inadequate to explain the realities of women's lives. In a message likely aimed at the male-dominated left, she wrote that she and her fellow liberationists “feel like we are thinking for ourselves for the first time in our lives...Those who believe that Marx, Lenin, Engels, Mao, and Ho have the only and last 'good word' on the subject and that women have nothing more to add will, of course, find these groups a waste of time.”⁶⁸

In “A Program for Feminist 'Consciousness Raising,’” Kathie Sarachild emphasized the centrality and utility of emotions to the women's liberation movement. Unlike the male-dominated left, which by the late 1960s saw emotions as a distraction from politics, liberationists like Sarachild saw emotions as the very basis of politics. As

⁶⁸ Carol Hanisch, “The Personal is Political,” undated [1969], folder 1.55, Women's Liberation Research Files.

she put it, “we assume that our feelings are telling us something from which we can learn...that our feelings mean something worth analyzing...that our feelings are saying something *political*, something reflecting fear that something bad will happen to us or hope, desire, knowledge that something good will happen to us.” Rather than the weakness or irrationality men often saw in women's emotional sensitivity, Sarachild believed that it had been, and could be, their greatest strength. She even interpreted the “hysterics, whining, bitching, etc.” commonly attributed to women as reasonable, strategic responses to a social structure in which emotions were among the few tools available to women. As she put it, “when we had hysterical fits, when we took things 'too' personally...we weren't underneath our feelings, but responding with our feelings correctly to a given situation of injustice. I say 'correctly' because at that time in history (and maybe even still), by first feeling and then revealing our emotions we were acting in the best strategical manner.” However, she avoided the assumption that women were *inherently* more emotional than men by suggesting that “this may be the reason we learned how to be so in touch with our feelings to begin with.” Rather than try to avoid emotions, Sarachild encouraged women to embrace them. “In our groups,” she wrote, “let's share our feelings and pool them. Let's let ourselves go and see where our feelings lead us. Our feelings will lead us to ideas and then to actions...Our feelings will lead us to our theory, our theory to our action, our feelings about that action to new theory and then to new action.”⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Kathie Sarachild (Amatniek), “A Program for Feminist 'Consciousness Raising,’” 1968, folder 1.55, Women's Liberation Research Files. The piece was prepared for the First National Women's Liberation Conference, held outside of Chicago on November 27, 1968. Sarachild later extended this analysis to a critique of a women's film festival, defining good films as those “open and honest to the ever-widening range of one's feelings and understandings of truth and human reality” and less successful films as those that “never seemed to get beneath the masks women wear.” Kathie Sarachild, “Women's Films—The Artistic Is Political,” undated, folder 3.5, Women's Liberation Research Files.

Conceptualized by its adherents as a dialogical process, consciousness raising took place in “small groups” that allowed women to speak about their individual experiences, realize that these individual experiences were often shared experiences, and attempt to draw conclusions or broader analyses about these experiences. As a Boston-area women’s liberationist put it, “a method is needed to explain how ideas are intrinsic to physical reality; our experiences as females contains [*sic*] all the material necessary to discover principles that will form the theory for a social revolution.”⁷⁰ However, it was not always an easy journey from experienced, even shared experiences, to theory. Unlike the cells or study groups of previous revolutionary movements, consciousness raising groups were human-centered—places in which “women...relate to one another as full human beings.”⁷¹ In other words, they rejected the perceived regimentation and dogma of earlier leftist movements. According to Linda Gordon and Meredith Tax of Bread and Roses, this transformation was a key “contribution of the women’s liberation movement.”⁷² Indeed, members balked at any hint of the disciplinary rigidity associated with more conventional revolutionary models. Linda Gordon wrote that when two members of their group began to speak about their experiences with the Venceremos Brigade, an SDS group founded in 1969 to send sympathetic Americans to Cuba in solidarity with its revolutionary movement, they “began hesitantly to talk about their experiences of socialism and revolutionary discipline. Instead of listening and trusting them, most of the collective panicked at the notion of discipline, and attacked them as if

⁷⁰ “Dialectical Materialism as a Tool for Female Liberation,” undated, folder 1.9, Women’s Liberation Research Files.

⁷¹ Linda Gordon and Meredith Tax, “Life in the Movement” (Part Two), 1970, folder 1.6, Women’s Liberation Research Files.

⁷² *Ibid.*

they were asking us to give up all our loving intimacy and transform ourselves into a cold Stalinist cell.”⁷³

Yet, consciousness raising was an inherently communal activity, and thus members had to reconcile their individualist urges with the group setting. It was indeed this group setting, according to Pamela Kearon, a member of several New York-based groups including New York Radical Women, Redstockings, and The Feminists, from which consciousness raising derived its power. While women possessed strength as individuals, only as a group could they create power. Defined as “the ability to mobilize strength,” power “exists only when two or more persons concur in a purpose.” The most important aspect of power was that it allowed groups to define their own reality and truths. Women, often isolated from one another, had long been denied this ability, while “the male interpretation of the world has behind it the army, navy, marines and air force, billions of dollars, intricate bureaucratic traditions, ancient educational institutions and total control over scientific development.” Lacking the power to advance their own vision of reality, women had no choice but to accept the male version. Consciousness-raising groups could change this, for “the group creates its own reality and its own truth. Knowing that reality is whatever is agreed upon by society, the group creates its own society and thereby its own power...A group, opposed to society and existing within it, is a challenge to its idea of REALITY and the security of its TRUTHS.” This was not merely an intellectual exercise; rather, once a group had determined its reality, members could adopt lifestyles more in line with their view of the world, revealing to society at

⁷³ Ibid.

large that healthier alternatives existed and creating egalitarian arenas in which authentic selves could be expressed.⁷⁴

Indeed, reclaiming “reality”—as something based on experience, not theory—stood out as one of the key goals of consciousness raising. In a piece titled “Defining Reality,” for example, Redstockings member Lynn O'Connor argued that “the small group functions as an area of reality testing—a place where the members see their experiences mirrored in each other, where they are able to check and reaffirm their perceptions.” That is, an individual woman who may have been told all her life that her perceptions of the world were distorted would learn from hearing others’ similar stories that she had been correct all along. It was the dialogic nature of consciousness raising—itsself a delicate balance between the individual and the group—that allowed women to trust their perceptions of the world and interpretations of their experiences.⁷⁵ Similarly, Barbara Susan found in consciousness raising what she had not found in therapy—a place in which women “were trusting to their own minds and experiences to understand oppression” and to “formulate an analysis based on our real experiences.” It was “a way of forming a political analysis on information we can trust is true. That information is our experience.”⁷⁶ In the words of a 1969 Redstockings manifesto, “we regard our personal experience, and our feelings about that experience, as the basis for an analysis of

⁷⁴ Pamela Kearon, “Power as a Function of the Group,” August 1969, folder 1.28, Women's Liberation Research Files. At least for Pamela Kearon, and perhaps for others, the dichotomy between theory and reality seems to have come directly from Hannah Arendt, the Frankfurt School philosopher and German emigre for whom overarching theories had the potential to lead to totalitarianism. Although skeptical of feminism, and the social movements of the 1960s more generally, Arendt's theories helped to provide a usable language for women's liberationists. A note at the bottom of Kearon's piece reads, “For more on the idea of a *space* and its significance with respect to power see *The Human Condition*—Hannah Arendt.” Kearon, “Power as a Function of the Group.”

⁷⁵ Lynn O'Connor, “Defining Reality,” undated, folder 1.29. Women's Liberation Research Files.

⁷⁶ Barbara Susan, “About My Consciousness Raising.”

our common situation. We cannot rely on existing ideologies as they are all products of male supremacist culture. We question every generalization and accept none that are not confirmed by our experience.”⁷⁷ Women’s liberationists, that is, claimed for themselves the emphasis on authenticity that they had been exposed to both in the broader culture and the early New Left, even as the men who dominated the movement were abandoning the concept.

Redstockings members expanded on this ethos at a March, 1970, women's liberation meeting in San Francisco; the title of this chapter is taken from a speech given by Joan Jordan at this meeting. “Our politics,” she argued, “begin with our feelings. Feelings are a direct response to the events and relationships that we experience; that's how we know what's really going on.” In different times and different ways, women's knowledge had been rejected as “magic, instinct, intuition, witchcraft, and more recently, projections, distortions, [and] personal hang-ups.”⁷⁸ In a different version of this address (it seems to have been used by multiple Redstockings members with slight variations), Lynn O'Connor emphasized that one of the key means by which male chauvinism perpetuated itself was “the idea that [women's] 'feelings' are not a reflection of reality...Men's feelings have been categorized as thought, ideas, and intellect, or anything else connecting reality. If the oppressed people's perceptions of their condition are by definition un-real and the oppressors are by definition real, everything that follows will obviously support the status quo.”⁷⁹ What these women's liberationists sought to do was

⁷⁷ Redstockings Manifesto,” 1969, folder 1.29, Women's Liberation Research Files.

⁷⁸ Joan Jordan, Sunday Night Open Meeting of Redstockings, March 21, 1970, folder 1.29, Women's Liberation Research Files.

⁷⁹ Lynn O'Connor, article, undated [1970], folder 1.46, Women's Liberation Research Files.

to turn this rejected knowledge into the basis of a movement. As Jordan's version continued, "information derived from our feelings is our only reliable information; and our political analysis can be trusted only so long as it does not contradict our feelings." In the small group, women could begin to resist "the enormous pressure placed on us everywhere to deny our own perceptions or feelings." Moreover, it was only through the uncensored sharing of emotions, Jordan argued, that women's liberation could remain pure, uncorrupted by "the media, the new left, and the old left all of which are run by men, and, consequently, interested in destroying us." She believed that "our only protection is in our method of sharing our real feelings regardless of how unacceptable we fear they are...We can withstand the efforts to co-opt us if we honestly share the feelings such efforts evoke and deal with their causes by real support." In other words, a community of women could counteract the isolation and alienation experienced in a male-dominated society, which told its female members that their own thoughts, feelings, and analyses of both their own experiences and the world at large were inauthentic.⁸⁰

One of the most important legacies of the great 1960s social movements, including the women's liberation movement, was the emergence of identity politics—movements based on the idea that political convictions derived not from theories and ideologies but from the self and its experiences, emotions, and analyses of the world. Until now, however, identity politics has not been fully historicized; its origins in Cold

⁸⁰ Jordan was quick to point out, however, that the belief in a mythic "sisterhood" was idealistic and naïve: "Within our movement there is a strong tendency toward idealism which is dangerous because it obscures real motivations with fancy rhetoric about morals and ethics which makes us afraid or ashamed to express our true feelings and blocks the communication of information necessary for successful evaluation of real conditions. We cannot rely on the moral principle of a sisterhood which does not exist. It is as absurd as its power counterpart, the Mafia or brotherhood. What we can rely on is a real understanding of the necessity of the collectivity in order to achieve the ends of the self-interests of each one of us. Good and bad is not at issue. Our success depends on a realistic appraisal of the conditions of every situation, not on our wishes, and idealistic thinking hinders such an appraisal."

War anti-totalitarian thought that made the self the surest bulwark against totalitarianism have remained obscured. In their attempts to develop a self-based theory of politics, the group of women's liberationists discussed here drew not only on the various places in which these ideas were disseminated in the broader culture, including humanistic psychology, Method acting, Beat writing, and liberal feminism, but also on the theories and contradictory realities to which they were exposed in the early SDS, which by the late 1960s had rejected its earlier humanism.

However, women's liberationists could not simply and unknowingly borrow male leftists' own understanding of authenticity; they first had significantly to alter its meaning. Whereas male leftists defined authenticity as the expression of *individual* truth, women's liberationists believed that this focus on self-expression could do nothing to alter the social relations that alienated them from their true, authentic selves in the first place. Instead, liberationists hoped that sharing personal stories could lead to a collectively-determined truth that, when constantly tested against the reality of individual lived experience, could aid women in their attempts to implement more egalitarian social relations. Only then, they believed, would the authentic self-expression they experienced in consciousness-raising groups be possible in the world at large. In this way, women's liberationists turned authenticity from an individualistic, sexist discourse into one that served as the basis for a structural critique of gender relations.

Conclusion

The 1960s had barely drawn to a close when commentators began to remark on the decade's meaning. In 1971, veteran community organizer and Old Left activist Saul Alinsky addressed his *Rules for Radicals* to a New Left in disarray. The past few years had brought factionalism, violence, and, eventually, collapse. These young radicals, Alinsky argued, had suffered from a lack of guidance from his generation because of its decimation by McCarthyism. The New Left had never had the opportunity to learn valuable lessons from their forebears, most crucially, as Alinsky saw it, the importance of avoiding dogma. As he warned in no uncertain terms,

Dogma is the enemy of human freedom. Dogma must be watched for and apprehended at every turn and twist of the revolutionary movement. The human spirit glows from the small inner light of doubt whether we are right, while those who believe with complete certainty that they possess the right are dark inside and darken the world outside with cruelty, pain, and injustice.¹

Alinsky feared that New Leftists, convinced that theirs was the only right way, were in danger of falling into this morass. He encouraged them instead to test their theories against the reality of lived experience, arguing that the successful organizer “must constantly examine life, including his own, to get some idea of what it is all about, and he must challenge and test his own findings.”² Only then, “free from the shackles of dogma,” could the organizer “respond to the realities of the widely different situations

¹ Saul Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals: A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Radicals* (1971; repr., New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 4.

² *Ibid.*, 11.

our society presents.”³ With dogma abandoned, the organizer could draw on something more flexible and truer to make sense out of the world: her or his own self. “Having his own identity,” Alinsky argued, the organizer “has no need for the security of an ideology or a panacea.”⁴ Individual experiences and perceptions could diagnose a situation much more accurately than dogma could.

By the late 1960s, the New Left had indeed descended into a frenzy of increasingly rigid dogmatism. This had not always been this case. Rather, as I have argued throughout this dissertation, the early New Left was motivated by precisely the suspicion of dogma that Alinsky recommended. Moreover, it was to distance themselves from Alinsky’s generation that New Left members had adopted this position. They perceived an Old Left beholden to ideologies that deprived individuals of the truth of their own experiences, and they, like Alinsky, hoped to substitute the authentic insights gleaned by the self for the false prescriptions of rigid ideologies.

In doing so, New Left members drew on a broader culture in which ideology was associated with totalitarianism and authenticity functioned as its antidote. Growing out of the anti-fascism of the 1930s left, especially the theories of Jewish-German Frankfurt School intellectuals, the concept of totalitarianism conflated Nazi Germany and the Stalinist Soviet Union into a terrifying specter of authoritarianism that, at its most fundamental level, was perceived as turning a citizenry into a mass and an individual into an automaton. With its close ties to both communism as an ideology and the Communist Party as an organization, the Old Left of the 1930s became by the height of the Cold War a common example of this perceived “massification.” One of the ways in which the New

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., 79.

Left tried to prove its newness was by rejecting all such overarching theories and analyses of the world in favor of the truth of individual experiences and emotions—the essence of what I call authenticity.

Donning the mantle of authenticity, I argue, granted Cold War anti-totalitarianism a strange and remarkable legacy. It essentially made the recognition and expression of individual truth into a national security issue, a crucial battle in the Cold War. Only inasmuch as individual truth trumped ideology, its adherents insisted, was the United States different from the Soviet Union. The belief that politics appropriately derived from one's experiences—eventually known as identity politics—was one of the most important developments of the second half of the twentieth century, with vast and wide-ranging effects on social policy, education, and the strategies employed by marginalized groups demanding equality.

The women's liberation movement, which grew in part out of the male-dominated New Left and flourished as it crumbled, was quick to draw on this new strategy. As activists in Students for a Democratic Society, young women faced the reality that the men who dominated the organization extended the right to individual truth only as far as other men. Women's own experiences and emotions were dismissed as apolitical, and women themselves were associated with the "mass" that participatory democracy theorists hoped to escape. In this, New Left men drew on a longer history, one in which the ostensibly egalitarian discourse of authenticity was deployed in a highly sexist fashion.

Generally conceived of as part of the second-wave feminist movement, women's liberationists also constituted a third wave of women who attempted to write themselves

into the culture of authenticity. Like Stella Adler and her students, like the Beat women, women's liberationists argued that their individual truths, too, deserved to be heard. They recognized from the start what Adler (and the Friedan of *The Feminine Mystique*) did not and the Beat women did only gradually and unevenly: their own experiences and emotions, not just those deemed authentic by men, informed their politics. They did not need to transcend or escape the reality of their lives in order to be authentic, as Adler and others argued. Rather, these experiences, and their emotions surrounding them, formed the basis of their analyses of the world. Women's liberationists differed, too, from someone like Tennessee Williams, for whom the *expression* of one's authentic, individual truth was enough—social and political change were sure inevitably to follow. Thus, while consciousness-raising groups bore much in common with the relationship Williams conceived between the performance and the audience, they were only a first step: action to implement the truths recognized in consciousness-raising sessions was still necessary. Authentic self-expression was the beginning of political activism, but not, as it was for Williams, the activism itself.

It was no coincidence that the politics of SDS or women's liberation, which rested so fundamentally on the expression of the authentic self, resembled the aesthetics of Tennessee Williams or Jack Kerouac. In the years during and just after World War Two, the artist came to be revered as a person peculiarly capable of expressing her or his authentic self and thus resisting the siren song of fascism and then totalitarianism. Armed with a greater ability to preserve their individuality, artists were thus useful models for people who hoped to resist or escape from massification and conformity. This was as true in 1941, when Erich Fromm wrote *Escape from Freedom*, as it was in 1963-

64, when SDS activists imagined an educational system that would allow them to live like artists.

Despite the exalted position of the artist among the nation's anti-fascist, anti-totalitarian forces, art itself was useful to the postwar left not as something that conveyed a political message, but rather as a perfect expression of the artist's insides. Indeed, political art, because it was perceived as imposing an ideology on an individual and thus taking away the ability to express her or his true self, was tantamount to totalitarianism in the eyes of many New Left activists. Authenticity, itself a crucial difference between the Old Left and the New Left, also precluded the appearance of a cultural front in the 1960s.

Artists, moreover, were not only people who possessed authenticity, they also expressed, or performed, it. The expression of one's true self was a crucial part of the concept of authenticity as defined by the groups and individuals discussed here, and thus performance was, too. Far from being mutually exclusive, authenticity and performance were actually mutually constitutive. This surprising confluence points to new directions of inquiry into the cultural, intellectual, and political history of the twentieth century. As I have argued throughout this dissertation, the connection between anti-totalitarianism and authenticity helps us to understand the emergence of identity politics in the second half of the twentieth century. Identifying the inherently performative nature of authenticity, however, may also help us understand the emergence of postmodernism.

It may seem strange to connect authenticity and postmodernism, or to suggest that identity politics, which apotheosized the liberal humanist subject, and postmodernism, which called for its dissolution, shared a common genealogy linked to Cold War anti-totalitarianism. Indeed, with its unmitigated belief in the existence of a true self,

authenticity functioned in many ways as a form of resistance against the constructivism that underlies much of postmodernism. New Left activist and philosopher Marshall Berman, who identified and celebrated SDS's investment in authenticity as early as 1970, has also been an insistent critic of postmodernism, especially its central tenet that an individual's thoughts and feelings do not come from her or his true self, but rather are imposed by society. He has been particularly critical of those who, like Michel Foucault, emphasize the impossibility of escape from this situation.⁵

Yet, the centrality of performance as the *sine qua non* of authenticity also points to postmodernism. For Tennessee Williams as for SDS members, even a deliberate, rehearsed act honed for a particular audience could still be an authentic expression of one's true self. Robert Genter's work is helpful here. Genter has coined the term "late modernism" to describe those postwar thinkers and artists who, like sociologists David Riesman and Erving Goffman, conceived of the self as *both stable and performative*. This performance of authentic selfhood was not, I argue, important only to Genter's late modernists, but also to the groups he identifies as high modernists, including Frankfurt School members and their U.S.-born counterparts, and romantic modernists, including the Beats. Indeed, the concept of expressive or performative authenticity resonated with many, if not all, of the groups and individuals discussed here. As Genter correctly notes, all modernists were motivated by a fear of totalitarianism. They were equally motivated, I argue, not just by a faith in authenticity, but by the need to express, or perform, the authentic self as a way of staving off such authoritarian regimes. Cultural and intellectual

⁵ On SDS and authenticity, see Marshall Berman, *The Politics of Authenticity: Radical Individualism and the Emergence of Modern Society* (New York: Atheneum, 1970), ix-xi. On the moral bankruptcy of postmodernism, see Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), 27-8, 34-5.

responses to Cold War anti-totalitarianism, that is, may have fed into both identity politics and postmodernism, two political streams that often appear irreconcilable.⁶

Fully exploring the relationship between authenticity and postmodernism lies outside the bounds of this dissertation. Yet, it seems clear that the connections between both authenticity and performance and culture and politics continue to influence our 21st-century milieu, including its leftist movements. Now in his late seventies, Richard Schechner recently asked, “What can performance studies do to help save the world?”⁷ He intended this question not as a rhetorical musing on the state of his field, but rather as a response to a new kind of political protest: the Occupy movement.

Beginning in the fall of 2011, first in New York City and soon in other parts of the country, the Occupy movement has staked out territory in public parks, demanding that the economy respond to the needs of the 99%—the vast majority of Americans who perform the bulk of the nation’s labor, yet receive few of its rewards. As Schechner notes, Occupy includes “loud and clear echoes of the great freedom and student movements of the 1960s and 1970s,” as well as connections to the Arab Spring uprisings of the past year.⁸ As a protest movement that takes place largely in public, and that depends for its efficacy on engagement with spectators, it is also an example of how “performances are—or at least can be—model utopian societies.”⁹

The groups and individuals discussed in this dissertation put a slightly different spin on Schechner’s question, asking not what performance studies, but rather the

⁶ See Robert Genter, *Late Modernism: Art, Culture, and Politics in Cold War America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

⁷ Richard Schechner, “Comment: Occupy Solidarity,” *TDR: The Drama Review* 56:1 (Spring 2012): 8.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁹ *Ibid.*

performance of the authentic self, could do to help save the world. In their minds, the answer was simple: a great deal, indeed. They were not perfect in their attempts to implement this belief, especially, as this dissertation has argued, in terms of race and gender politics. Yet, they were correct in trying to offer an alternative to a system that continues to reduce the perceived worth of a human being to her or his market value, her or his ability to be an efficient cog in the corporate capitalist machine. Moving forward, let us both learn from their mistakes and be inspired by their example.

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