

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

GETTING PERSONAL:

POLITICS AND THE PROBLEM OF SUBJECTIVITY IN POSTWAR AMERICA

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE HUMANITIES

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

BY

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DECEMBER 2017

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For dad.

## Acknowledgments

I owe a lot to Lauren and Debbie for all of their support, encouragement, and precious feedback throughout the years. Without their careful reading of drafts and enthusiasm about the significance of personalism, this project would never have become the dissertation that it is.

I am also grateful for the scholarly community that I found at and through the University of Chicago, especially the American Cultures Workshop, my English department cohort, the staff at Critical Inquiry, and Debbie's 20<sup>th</sup> century Americanists group.

Finally, I must thank the friends that helped to lighten the burden of loneliness that research can so often demand. Katie, Carmen, Ingrid, David, Hadji, Cass, Haidee, Luca, and Matteo – I so appreciate all of the love.

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## Introduction.

### The Individual, the Mass Subject, and the Personalist Alternative

People were now individuals, on their own, rootless, fragmented. Individuals, but not persons.  
– A.J. Muste, “Saints for this Age”, 1962

There is a difference, however, between revealing personal material and being personal... One can be personal *without* revealing personal material; “personal” is an attitude, a way of running risks with people, not a content... it is a reaching out to another, not knowing what might happen next.  
– William Coulson, “Inside a Basic Encounter Group,” 1970

Related to this thinning of social commitment and social investment, we note an increased sensitivity to interpersonal relations—a desire for friendship, warm relationships at work and in the family, a desire for personal impact in everyday encounters... The search for satisfying warm relationships which was primarily a feature of middle-class, educated life in 1957 has spread more broadly in 1976.  
– Joseph Veroff, *Inner American*, 1981

My dissertation presents an archive of mostly American thinkers, political activists, scholars, and writers and their work from the period of roughly 1945-1975, as they elaborated responses to what they perceived as a crisis of social experience. The figures I trace throughout the project were personalists, in the sense that they saw personal relationships, values, problems, experiences, hopes, and fears—the stuff of the private, traditionally speaking—as provisions for repairing what seemed a broken world. The personalist thesis about a world broken by war and modernity was not a new idea in the postwar period.<sup>1</sup> As Jonathan Flatley has noted, “melancholic concern” with modernity as an experience of loss already resonated discursively by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, marking “the place where modernity touche[d] down in our lives in the

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<sup>1</sup> A version of what Mark Greif has termed “the crisis of man,” see Greif, *The Age of the Crisis of Man: Thought and Fiction in American from 1933-1973*.

most intimate ways” (Flatley 3).<sup>2</sup> By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, expression of melancholic loss had become “a historical-aesthetic methodology” in its own right (Ibid. 3). Yet while the idea of a world in crisis had framed thinking about modernity long before the postwar period, the events of World War Two quickly proliferated belief in this crisis and extended its implications. The crisis thesis became a key organizing metanarrative for the intellectual and social life of the post-World War Two United States, linking a range of its political, philosophical, cultural, aesthetic, social, scientific, and religious conversations, as cultural commentators all along the political spectrum agreed that something had gone drastically wrong in human experience.<sup>3</sup> By the early 1960s, public discourse in a variety of fields—including orthodox and mystical theology, liberal philosophy, utopian technocracy, liberal humanism, and psychology—took this premise for granted, maintaining that the postwar world was plagued with loneliness and anomie, ruptured social networks, misplaced moral anchors, and existential drift (Greif 15).<sup>4</sup>

The expanding explanatory power of this discourse was tied up in a plethora of well-noted historical transformations to the postindustrial United States that marked the rise of the postwar middle class and the growth of mass consumer culture, mass market advertising, and a bureaucratic managerial ethos—all of which were thrown into relief by the threats posed by the new forms of violence and atrocity that emerged during the Second World War. The conclusion drawn by many cultural commentators was that the post-Hiroshima landscape lacked the shared horizon of meaning that had previously ostensibly proffered social stability, common moral principles, and affective community. Though this world-in-crisis discourse originated in

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<sup>2</sup> For accounts of earlier instantiations of this discourse of world-in-crisis see for instance Greif’s *The Age of the Crisis of Man*, Flatley’s *Affective Mapping*, and Martin Jay’s *Songs of Experience*.

<sup>3</sup> See for instance Barry Goldwater’s *The Conscience of a Conservative*, Paul Goodman’s *Growing Up Absurd*, the Students for a Democratic Society’s “Port Huron Statement,” and Whitaker Chambers’s *Witness*.

<sup>4</sup> Greif notes that “Man became at midcentury the figure everyone insisted must be addressed, recognized, helped, rescued, made the center, the measure, the ‘root,’ and released for ‘what was in him’” (Greif 8).

cosmopolitan intellectual circles, during the U.S. postwar period it quickly proliferated to become a site of mass concern, fashioning a consensus about social and moral experience that was largely a “false universalization” of the expanding American middle-class’s encounter with a transforming socio-political landscape—a consensus “forged by a similarity of outlook and experience and maintained by strong personal and institutional links” (Hoborek 4, Berman 9).<sup>5</sup>

The broken world thesis was moreover “confirmed” by postwar U.S. social science: an extensive, twenty-year study on the psychological state of the American people, funded by the national government, concluded that while “American social criticism tends to the hyperbolic” in its discussions of the postwar crisis of experience, and “relied too heavily on and generalized too widely from observations of special groups in the population (particularly intellectuals and the media elites),” its concerns “undoubtedly picked up on and reflected themes” with a basis in reality that were tied to “reduced integration of American adults into the social structure” (Veroff 16).<sup>6</sup> The study upheld the crisis discourse’s main claim that “[s]ocial organization, social norms, [and] the adaption to and successful performance of social roles all seem to have lost some of their power to provide people with meaning, identity elements, satisfaction” in the postwar period (Veroff 17).

The narratives proliferating around the broken world thesis, while generalizing an experience not nearly as common as many of its proponents assumed, did not merely express a conservative romantic nostalgia. They also indexed anxiety about a series of well-noted economic, social, and geographic transformations reorganizing the post-World War Two United

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<sup>5</sup> See Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America*, Catherine Jurca’s *The White Diaspora: The Suburb and the Twentieth-Century American Novel*, Andrew Hoborek’s *The Twilight of the Middle Class: Post-World War II American Fiction and White-Collar Work*, and Leerom Medovoi’s *Rebels: Youth and the Cold War Origins of Identity*.

<sup>6</sup> See the extensive study, *Americans View their Mental Health*, or the associated monograph elaborating its findings by Veroff, *The Inner American: A Self Portrait from 1957 to 1976*.

States. The postwar period saw, for instance, a pronounced geographic dislocation attending the increased economic mobility of a swelling middle class—which also resulted in shifts away from the domestic and social structures offered by the extended family toward the unit of the nuclear family. This middle-class boom changed patterns of U.S. private property ownership and was also proximate to the tradeoffs between labor and management underwriting the period’s Keynesian state-spending and regulation programs, aimed at promoting economic growth, and the Cold War containment politics that were consolidating the national government as a welfare-warfare state. The emerging global dominance of U.S. economic power and the rise of mass media and mass market advertising moreover began managing citizen desires in new ways, as the country transitioned toward a service and information-based economy. All of these changes were welded by the rise of an ever-growing U.S. managerial culture, spreading new professional and bureaucratic beliefs about expertise, higher education, and consumer culture that promoted a distinct ethos of individual productivity and rationality.<sup>7</sup>

The dovetailing of this managerialism with establishment Cold War politics established a sort of U.S. “corporate commonwealth” that marked the rise of post-Fordism and expanded the government regulation of the economy that had begun during the years of the New Deal and taken on a new life during the Second World War (McCarragher 91-92).<sup>8</sup> At the same time, explosive migration of new populations to the suburbs radically altered the middle-class social organization: “[p]olitically, the suburbs deradicalized labor; culturally, they interpellated Americans as consumers; economically, they propped up social demand” (Medovoi 17). The social, economic, and geographic dislocation associated with this suburban migration and the

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<sup>7</sup> See Hoborek, Lears, and *More: The Politics of Economic Growth in Postwar America* by Robert M. Collins.

<sup>8</sup> See Medovoi, Collins, and *Christian Critics: Religion and the Impasse in Modern American Social Thought* by Eugene McCarragher.

growth of welfare-warfare statism meant that traditional structures mediating between individuals like the extended family, the urban neighborhood, the church, the labor association, or the ethnic enclave were weakened and sometimes replaced by professional and bureaucratic modes of socialization (Abbott and Sparrow 308).

These changes were reflected by evolutions of the prevailing models for theorizing individuals and social relations. Notably, in a shift away from social engineering (and its ties to totalitarianism), sociology's dominant conceptual tool for figuring society, the Chicago School model, was replaced with the Individual-Collectivity (IC) model. Whereas Chicago School sociology had explained social life according to the dynamics among multiple, contentious groups inhabiting the same geographical space, the IC model instead divided society into two distinct, abstract planes of experience: the individual and the collective.<sup>9</sup> In replacing the Chicago School's emphasis on multi-group conflict and the dynamics of intergroup relations with a structural, two-poled analysis, the IC model setup a binary between individual and collective, personality and culture, that reduced social life to a dualism eliding other social formations (Sparrow and Abbott 301). In the IC model, bureaucracy performed the work of connective tissue between these two opposing levels. Offering bureaucracy as that which replaced the forms of social cohesion previously supplied by ethnic and religious affiliations or voluntary local community organizations, the IC model thus pointed toward the "disappearance of the middle ground" and "continued thinning of community ties" indicated by the broken world discourse, which perceived a breakdown in the social forms mediating between individuals and structures that had traditionally served as the basis of social experience (Abbott

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<sup>9</sup> They were theorized "as microcosm/macrocosm (the individual contains a picture of the 'larger' society or its values); as normative (society provides 'rules' that govern or 'integrate' individuals); and as purely aggregative (society is merely the appearance of individual attitudes or behaviors taken as aggregates)" (Abbott and Sparrow 301-2).

and Sparrow 307, Herman 263). In this sense, the IC paradigm manifested the broken world thesis in that it modelled and normalized the limited social experience that the postwar crisis of experience discourse indexed. By accounting for social life as a tension between individualism and collectivism that was mediated by bureaucracy, it moreover bolstered the dualism between individualism and communitarianism that was especially characteristic of the era. As I will argue, the ‘personal’ emerged as an alternative bridge between the two poles of this model, a substitute for the impersonalism of bureaucratic culture that negotiated between the tension this theoretical framework posed between autonomy and belonging.

A swath of postwar texts attest to the ways the U.S. middle class greeted these changes to their social landscape with both fear and an embrace.<sup>10</sup> As George Cotkin has noted, “a discourse of anxiety exploded into the vocabulary of everyday life in the postwar years,” as “Kirkegaardian categories of anxiety helped fashion much of the rhetoric of postwar American intellectuals” (Cotkin 55-56). The midcentury U.S. suburban exodus and rise of managerial and consumer cultures was underwritten with a strong current of apprehension about an allegedly lost sense of autonomy that, as Andrew Hoborek argues, disclosed concern that white-collar employment was becoming too much like blue-collar laboring for a living: massifying its practitioners through conformism and organizing their lives around work (Hoborek 8, 9). In the “age of anxiety,” as Arthur Schlesinger Jr. pronounced it, this concern was frequently expressed as what Timothy Melley has termed “agency panic”: a pervasive “postwar rhetoric of diminished agency” tied to anxieties about determinism, social control, and ideology that framed changes in social

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<sup>10</sup> Here I am thinking of texts such as William H. Whyte’s *The Organization Man*, C. Wright Mill’s *White Collar: The American Middle Classes*, and David Riesman’s, Nathan Glazer’s, and Reuel Denney’s *The Lonely Crowd*, as well as books, stories, and plays by Erich Fromm, J.D. Salinger, Sloan Wilson, Richard Yates, Saul Bellow, Walker Percy, Arthur Miller, Edward Albee, and John Cheever. I am also thinking of secondary criticism by scholars like Jurca, Medovoi, and *Real Phonies: Cultures of Authenticity in Post-World War II America* by Abbigail Cheever.

experience as a loss of the kind of liberal individualism that had been born with Hobbes and Locke (Schlesinger *Vital Center* 1, Melley 5). Informed by anticommunist Cold War politics, “agency panic” indexed worry that the postindustrial world was undermining the autonomy of the liberal individual, exposing her to deterministic social forces inducing uniformity that left her little freer than the socialist subject to which she was opposed (Ibid. 14). As Melley points out, “agency panic” essentially enshrined “a long-standing model of personhood—a view of the individual as a rational, motivated agent with a protected interior of beliefs, desires, and memories”—that had underwritten democratic political thinking since the emergence of social contract theory (Ibid. 14).

In this sense, liberal philosophy provided the conceptual vehicle for this figure of the individual as “a monad-like container” that circulated widely in and across various registers of postwar thinking (Jameson 63). The postwar “individual” was a Cartesian subject passed through liberal social contract theory: a rational, self-reliant, actor whose reason was sovereign over other internal forces (e.g., desire) and over external (e.g., social) ones too.<sup>11</sup> This figure was not only a main point of reference for the dominant sociological model of the period, it also informed postwar political theorizing, which conceived the international political stage as a field in which states functioned like individual actors, motivated by self-interest (Morgenthau 5).<sup>12</sup> This paradigm for describing and predicting political action framed politics as reducible to choices between rational actors with competing interests. The Cartesian subject’s reach extended also to market economics, which had always advanced a rhetoric of liberal individualism, and in the postwar period identified the subject as a market actor defined by individual choice preferences

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<sup>11</sup> “Cartesian” in the sense that it reflected the subject postulated by René Descartes, who posited subjectivity as a mind/body dualism unified through conscious awareness of the self. The Cartesian subject became the model for conceptions of subjectivity in modern political philosophy.

<sup>12</sup> See Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*.

(Clune 28-29). As the U.S. postwar economy of mass production and mass consumption reframed the economic subject as a *consumer*, it essentially advanced a form of mass individualism “grounded in the democratic rhetoric of choice and individuality, but practiced in a polity that was already a marketplace” (Turner 6).

Such individualism also subtended a long history of aesthetic theory framing the artist as an autonomous, singular genius. In the U.S. mid-twentieth century, this figure was consecrated in high modernism’s “canonical experiences of radical isolation and solitude, anomie, private revolt, [and] Van Gogh-type madness,” which dominated the institutional aesthetic and critical imaginary (Jameson 63). Individualism moreover buttressed much of the period’s ethical thinking. Existentialism, which had entered the U.S. scene through American introductions to Kierkegaard in the 1920s, but did not become a site of general interest until it arrived in the French form in 1946, foregrounded an isolated monadic individual making choices against the tragic backdrop of a morally compromised world (Cotkin 5).<sup>13</sup> The famous Sartrean claim that ‘existence precedes essence’ presented the radical freedom of the individual as the ultimate locus of her moral responsibility: with her extreme liberty came “the possibility of a more authentic existence” through moral choices that could give her irrational existence meaning (Ibid. 6).<sup>14</sup> Similarly, the U.S.’s preeminent postwar religious thinker, theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, held up the individual as the fundamental moral unit, arguing that group thinking facilitated sinfulness, while the individual was able to follow her conscience.

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<sup>13</sup> As chapter one will point out, it entered the U.S. national conversation largely thanks to intellectual magazines like *Partisan Review* and *politics*.

<sup>14</sup> Notably, as chapter one will suggest, Camus’s existentialism was much more personalist, in that it championed solidarity. Christian existentialism also often provided a framework for seeing social and personal concerns together, offering salvation as a mode of political repair (Rossinow 6). Chapter two will illustrate two personalist forms of Christian existentialism.

Such paradigms and discourses firmly entrenched individualism as the grounds for thinking subjectivity in the postwar U.S., where the individual constituted the economic (self-interested, choice-making actor), the political (autonomous, rational actor), and the ethical (self-conscious moral actor) subject. This figure was foiled by the specters of Soviet communalism, ideological conformism, and scientific determinism, which seemed to foretell the disappearance of the autonomous individual into the tranny of uniformity, irrational group thinking, and overpowering social and historical forces.

I argue in this dissertation that the personal emerged as a third alternative in this tension between the individual and the collective. It functioned as a rejection or negotiation of the forms of generality, impersonalism, and depersonalization widely understood to result from the reorganization of postindustrial U.S. society—and thus indexed the same concern about massification, conformism, and institutionalization raised by agency panic. In highlighting subjective experience and interpersonal relationships as means for social repair, personalists broke away from the vision of the monadic autonomous subject usually offered by world-in-crisis discourse. Indeed, whereas anxiety about the abstract mass subject during this period typically crystallized into mythologization of individualism, postwar personalism worked to distinguish the person, personal, and personality from the mass by emphasizing ethics, direct experiences, situational thinking, personal responsibility towards self, other, and world, and the idea that ordinary thoughts and practices held public significance. The personalist subject was neither impervious to others nor socially determined; it rejected the binary between individualism and collectivism by claiming that the crisis of experience should be addressed by rethinking what it meant to be together with others.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> French religious personalism also performed this function in 1930s France, though on a small smaller scale and with different political implications.

In this sense, personalism indexed a set of ways of rejecting the forms of subject hailing, identification, and social organization underwriting mass culture. The personalist turn toward personal life organized a constellation of concerns, practices, attitudes, and socio-political genres that negotiated anxiety about how the subject was framed and attempted to personalize mass forms of belonging. While they very often came in the trappings of humanism, the forms of personalism circulating in this period were not founded on the human, the universally shared biological condition. In fact, they tended to be skeptical of the type of generality to which the period's language of human rights appealed. Nor did personalists make reference to the human as a biopolitical unit.<sup>16</sup> Personalism instead gestured toward those swells around the human being that made up her "personal life": her daily interactions with others and the world. Skeptical of institutionalism and political ideology, personalists turned to the small-scale, the face-to-face, and the relational. They posited a person who was necessarily non-abstract: she was always *personal*, endowed with feelings, psychic experience, and subjective beliefs. Moreover, she was distinct from the person imagined by legal personhood, which founds modern politics on a subject entitled to rights and duties premised upon her rationality and abstract equality before the law (Naimou 42, 7).<sup>17</sup>

Thus if the U.S. postwar period is commonly historicized as one in which new forms of "expressive individualism" emerged in the face of "the rise of an automated, mass-consumption society"—and as a historical moment in which individuals attempted to define themselves as autonomous and unique against the expectations of "an increasingly immense and totally

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<sup>16</sup> I am thinking here of models of personhood like Giorgio Agamben's, which also position the Second World War as a type of crisis of experience but think the subject as defined by its own mortality.

<sup>17</sup> "Drawn from the Latin *persona*, which refers to the mask worn by classical actors to amplify their voice, the [legal] person evokes a much longer history as a paradoxical figure of concealment and disclosure, in which the mask stands in for the human as one whose voice may be heard before the law" (Naimou 19).

rationalized technology of cultural depersonalization”—the figures I turn to in this dissertation trace an alternative through-line across the period (Zaretsky 306, 305, Beidler 5). Some are well-known; others are more obscure or field-specific. Yet Dwight Macdonald, Nicola Chiaromonte, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King Jr., Carl Rogers, Kenneth Keniston, Robert J. Lifton, Joyce Carol Oates, and Toni Cade Bambara—critics, writers, activists, and scholars—all participated in the “broken world” discourse but responded by rethinking subjectivity in a manner that pointed *beyond* the forms of “expressive individualism” usually offered in the period. Instead, they conceptualized a subject who was fundamentally constituted by the interpersonal, the group, and other expressions of collectivity. The group of figures I collect together in this dissertation represents an original archive: chosen for their personalist orientations and not their conventional reputations, they have seldom been put in dialogue. They can be understood as a loose network of culture producers drawn toward the same concerns and modes of repair, who stretched the limits of subjectivity beyond the autonomous individual toward others in attempt to relocate the sense of meaningfulness they deemed lacking in the mass public scene. Their work and ideas reveal postwar personalism as a vernacular in the American mid-twentieth century that was mobilized in different ways by different people and appeared in varying idioms.

I have not discovered personalism nor am I alone in linking it to the postwar era. In *The Spirit of the 60s: Making Postwar Radicalism*, for instance, James J. Farrell discusses “the personalism of the 1960s” as “a combination of Catholic social thought, communitarian anarchism, radical pacifism, and humanistic psychology” that emerged from segments of French religious thought to ultimately inform the U.S. student movement (Farrell 6). Framing personalism as a mode of dissent oriented toward the 1960s liberal consensus, Farrell describes personalist politics as the emergence of “everyday life [as] the arena of politics” and the claim

“that everyday choices had political implications” (Ibid. 5, 4). Personalism is also obliquely addressed by various studies excavating more commonly studied U.S. postwar phenomena, including Cold War cultural politics, the proliferation and pluralization of psychology, the dispersion of existential thinking, and, of course, the emergence of identity politics.<sup>18</sup> None of these accounts, however, elaborate the personal as tradition of thinking an outside to individualism that mediates between self and collective nor do they tie this thinking to historically specific affective and discursive experiences. In attempting to offer such an account, I hope to illuminate U.S. postwar personalism as the story of a different response to the postwar crisis of experience than “agency panic,” an alternative history to those that trace a “culture of narcissism” and “rise of the self” across the period, and as another form of “the personal is political” than the one we know and recognize from feminism. For while we could perhaps interpret postwar personalism as a version of what Robert Genter has termed “late modernism,” a transitional state at the threshold of the modern and the postmodern, it seems more likely to undermine that very dichotomy. Indeed, personalism was almost always offered as a third perspective intended to undermine precisely such forms of dualism.

In an important sense, personalism marks the rise of the social as a political register across the U.S. postwar and long 1960s. Hannah Arendt famously defined “the rise of the social”—a section head in her weighty 1958 *The Human Condition*—as “the rise of the ‘household’ (oikia) or of economic activities to the public realm... [such that] all matters pertaining formerly to the private sphere of the family have become a ‘collective’ concern” (Arendt 33). For Arendt, whose text has become a keystone in cultural and intellectual histories

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<sup>18</sup> In addition to Greif, Genter, and McCarraher, see Robert S. Ellwood, *Sixties Spiritual Awakening: American Religion Moving from Modern to Postmodern*, Marshall Berman, *The Politics of Authenticity*, and Eli Zaretsky, *Secrets of the Soul: A Social and Cultural History of Psychoanalysis*.

of the period, the long migration of economic and biological need into the public sphere gave birth to the postwar crisis of experience. It created the conditions for a society that “expects from each of its members a certain kind of behavior, imposing innumerable and various rules, all of which tend to ‘normalize’ its members, to make them behave, to exclude spontaneous behavior or outstanding achievement” (40). For Arendt, the rise of the social reduced the political domain to a space of conformism—not only opening the door to totalitarianism but also signaling the loss of a previously autonomous field of political action (Arendt 35, 40-41). In lamenting the ostensible disappearance of an earlier political field in which the subject was free to act as an individual and creatively distinguish herself, Arendt not only turned to an agency-panicked broken world idiom, she also appealed to a politics of heroic individualism—making a resounding call to recover the public realm as a space “reserved for individuality” where agonal political actors could “could show who they really and inexchangeably were” (41).

Though emerging from the same discursive space as Arendt’s well-known invective against the social, personalism embraced the rise of the social and of personal experience as objects of political discourse. In this sense, it shares important undercurrents with social anarchism, liberal humanism, Christian existentialism, and early second-wave feminism, all of which argued that the political was synonymous with the social and asked what it therefore meant to perform a politics. Indeed, because the unfolding of the personal as political across the U.S. postwar was a phenomenon coextensive with the spreading reach of psychology, unprecedented interest in existential and phenomenological thinking, and experimentation with new types of political organization, it is often collapsed into more familiar narratives and intellectual traditions. In particular, it is often merged with or mistaken for the rise of postmodern forms of subjectivity, the intellectual roots of 1960s radicalism, and the emergence

of identity politics. The convergence of personalism with these conventional accounts of the period is hardly surprising considering that by 1970 “the personal is political” had become a feminist slogan rallying new political formations premised in the personal lives of traditionally sidelined political subjects. Yet the personal as it appears in U.S. identity politics is not synonymous with personalism. Though personalists were often committed to adjacent forms of empowerment, and certainly challenged institutional attempts to decide who was and was not a person, personalists were wary of and liked to complicate the idea of sovereignty. Reducing postwar personalism to a history of the rise of ‘the personal is political’ misses much of the point, because personalists were just as interested in making the political personal (and more ethical) as they were in arguing that the personal was always already political—and in this sense their aims did not entirely align with those of the early second-wave feminists responsible for the bringing into being conventional understandings of personal politics.

Thus, the personalists traced in this dissertation help to recontextualize identity politics, just as they reframe other stories we commonly tell about the U.S. postwar period. Indeed, their attempts to locate an alternative to individualism traced forms of subjectivity and modes of personalizing politics that sit uneasily with the metanarratives organizing our understandings of the era: postwar personalism weaves through and around our historicizing of the late U.S. 20<sup>th</sup> century with the American New Left at center stage and our tendency to reduce postwar political thinking into a triumphant and teleological account of the realignments and activism characterizing the mid and late 1960s and the rise of identity politics. Though personalism was certainly present in the philosophy of the U.S. New Left—the Post Huron Statement makes many personalist assertions—the student movement does not figure as this dissertation’s central plot

point.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, the personalists I take up in this dissertation in fact occupy both radical and conservative positions on the political spectrum, often at the same time, because their personalist commitments did not translate straightforwardly into the period's political conventions. In fact, one of the most interesting things about the personalists I discuss in this dissertation is how hard they are to categorize politically, since they often blended anarchism, pacifism, liberalism, conservatism, humanism, modernism, and antimodernism together. Articulating the different genres of personalism solely terms of the political movements of the 1960s is reductive not only of the work of personalizing politics performed by someone like Dorothy Day or Toni Cade Bambara but also of the stakes of their skepticism of the kinds of mass politics the New Left grew to embody.

Importantly, personalism also destabilizes the modern/postmodern dichotomy so often used to make sense of the late U.S. twentieth century. This narrative posits the postwar as a period of historical transition from “the project of modern politics... to define and implement universal goals like freedom, equality, and justice, in an attempt to transform institutional structures of domination,” into a postmodern politics of pluralism and difference skeptical of universals and institutions (Best and Kellner 2). It thus situates modernist thought as proximate to humanistic absolutes and universal values and as founded on a rational sovereign subject that is eventually replaced by a fractured postmodern subjectivity inhabiting a crisis of interpretation. The difference between the two paradigms is in fact embodied by these respective references to unity and fracture: while modernism privileges unity, universalism, and the movement toward consensus, postmodernism indexes deconstruction, fragmentation, and nonessentialism. Within this framework, postwar personalists on one hand seem to constitute a nascent postmodernism:

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<sup>19</sup> Including “that politics has 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” (Port Huron Statement).

they undermine monadic subjectivity and autonomous individualism, valorize personalized (and therefore relativized) truths and situational justification for values, and champion the smaller scale and the directly experienceable due to their ambivalence toward institutions, sweeping metanarratives, and dualisms. In this sense, they promote the “[i]ntersubjective forms of identity” and politics of subjectivity typically associated with postmodernism—manifesting the postmodern paradigm’s “new emphases on culture, personal identity, and everyday life,” as modernist “macropolitics were replaced by the micropolitics of local transformation” (Genter 15, Best and Kellner 3).

But the forms of subjectivity offered by postwar personalism are also far from the postmodern death and decentering of the subject and certainly cannot be said to adopt its embrace of consumerism and “mass cultural forms and formulas” as the building blocks of identity (Hoberek 116). Postwar personalists, after all, value consensus, meaning, and repair and reject all mass culture forms. From this perspective, personalism seems inherently modern and its critique of the liberal subject appears at odds with the postmodern substitution of this figure with one that is equally abstract: a bricolage of contents, lacking particular characteristics, and if not “devoid of feeling,” someone for whom “feelings—which it may be better and more accurate to call ‘intensities’—are now free-floating and impersonal” (Jameson 64). In this sense, neither the modern nor the postmodern seem to have real space for the form of personalized, interpersonally constituted subjectivity indexed by postwar personalism. Postwar personalists might instead be describable as antimodern modernists, recoiling at modernity’s fracturing of social unity, proliferation of fleeting mass forms, and cult of autonomous individualism—or better still, as modern-postmodern hybrids, blending modernity’s commitment to coherence and social cohesion with postmodernity’s interest in the local, intersubjective, and situational. In fact,

the intervention of this dissertation is that it exposes personalism as a network of political, ethical, and intellectual sympathies shared by seemingly disparate thinkers across the postwar period, and therefore opens up space for us to talk about an orientation toward social life animating the American postwar that mediated between dualisms like modern/postmodern or individual/collective—one that pushes back against the ways our metanarratives about “identity politics,” “radicalism,” or “postmodernity” obscure and collapse the period’s alternative currents of thought into better-known stories.

Each of the following four chapters takes up a different genre of personalism and traces it through a different discursive register. Essentially an interdisciplinary cultural history, the dissertation relies on close readings of private letters, essays, newspaper, magazine, and journal articles, sermons, short stories, a comic book, and a documentary film, and the different chapters look to cultural criticism, religion, political protest, psychology, and fiction to identify and historically situate the forms of personalism advanced by different postwar figures. The relationship among the chapters, though proceeding in a historically chronological order, is not meant to establish causality; rather, the dissertation is palimpsestic and kaleidoscopic, moving among different scenes of inquiry into a world in crisis to reveal a web of personalism across the mid and late U.S. twentieth century.

The figures that I discuss were chosen for the ways their personalist politics differed in emphasis and idiom; it was only afterwards that I discovered the series of overlaps among them. Day and King, for instance, while as far as I can tell only ever attended one of the same events, were actually closely linked by their work with pacifists A.J. Muste and Bayard Rustin. Muste and Rustin also started *Liberation* magazine, a periodical influential on the New Left that understood itself as an heir to Macdonald’s magazine *politics*. Macdonald meanwhile wrote an

in-depth profile of Day that incited his life-long appreciation for her work, and Robert Coles, a colleague of Keniston and Lifton, began his career as a Catholic Worker and also published a lengthy interview with Day. Such crisscrossing is on one hand predictable, given how these figures were drawn by the concerns and political approaches, but it is also surprising and suggests that personalism is worth further unravelling.

The dissertation begins in 1945 with the politics of friendship that emerged between two humanist intellectuals and cultural critics: Dwight Macdonald, an American editor with experience in the battles of the pre-war left, and Nicola Chiaromonte, an Italian antifascist exile. Living through the Second World War (Chiaromonte in fact fleeing Europe for his life), Macdonald and Chiaromonte experienced the postwar “broken world” crisis quite palpably as a failure of politics. In response to the moral catastrophes of the war—its use of nuclear violence and barbaric expression of inhumanity—they offered a form of personalism that looked to ethics and to small-group communities organized around shared values as alternative foundations for political action. As this personalist model, which would later be embraced by the American student movement, underwent challenge by the realist exigencies of the postwar historical moment, Macdonald and Chiaromonte turned to the cultivation of audiences with shared tastes in attempt to reconfigure their model of political community. Ultimately, however, it was their long personal friendship that most effectively modelled their reparative vision for the postwar crisis of the political.

Chapter two moves away from this cosmopolitan intellectual milieu to take up U.S. religious personalism as a response to postwar desubjectification. Dorothy Day and Martin Luther King Jr., both self-identified personalists maintaining the existence of a personal God, framed the depersonalizing experiences of racism, violence, and poverty as indices of a world

damaged by its divorce from the divine. They looked to personal responsibility as a methodology for reconstructing personhood and oriented their politics toward the reparative potential offered by a form of community fused by the divine. Alternatively, chapter three considers transformations of the psychological subject that emerged in response to the depersonalization, determinism, and objectification shaping postwar social science. Psychologists Carl Rogers, Kenneth Keniston, and Robert J. Lifton attempted to rethink psychological experience as a shared space by theorizing intersubjective forms of personhood within a discursive world that answered the postwar crisis with individualism and agency panic.

Finally, chapter four situates personalism in relation to identity politics, using the short fiction of Joyce Carol Oates and Toni Cade Bambara to illustrate how postwar personalism was sympathetic to but also diverged from the forms of identity politics we conventionally associate with ‘the personal as political.’ Their writing dramatizes the continued persistence of the postwar crisis of experience into and through the 1970s—after histories like Grief’s suggest it to have climaxed and transitioned into postmodern and neoliberal concerns. Oates and Day thus speak to the persistence of personalism as a site of desire and aspiration well into the 1970s, illuminating the ways its commitments were in conversation with the period’s discourses of identity.

The account of the American postwar that this dissertation ultimately offers reveals personalism as a vernacular available to the period’s commentary class as a means for articulating a reparative vision of social life. Yet while the terms of the personalist critique were often shared, they were mobilized in varied ways by different figures attempting to articulate what reconceived collectivity and autonomy might look like. Personalism thus points to a rich tradition of alternative political thinking in the postwar U.S.—one that reflects both entrenched

skepticism of the nation's mythology of individualism and an equally entrenched commitment to its mythology of consensus.

Chapter One.  
Humanity, “Year Zero”: Dwight Macdonald, Nicola Chiaromonte,  
and the Politics of Friendship

I knew Nick had a bad heart and for years, of course, but I somehow was unprepared emotionally—I really never thought he’d die, leave us, and I can’t get used to the idea of my world permanently without him. It’s the most *depriving* death in my life since my dear father died...Ever since we met in 1944, he’s been my best friend, the one person—despite recent political-cultural disagreements, w. were so painful to us both—I felt closest to morally and intellectually, also personally. The one person, except my poor dear father, that gave me the feeling of being valued for myself, individually, not for my brains (though also for them too) or achievements, just for myself—a personal love and respect—as I felt for him too, but it was not quite an equal relationship, emotionally—I now think—more like a father to a son, despite our almost equal ages, a good father, like mine, and one who...shared my intellectual interests and was also a brother in that we could talk about things on the same level...

Well, dearest Miriam, you know all this. He was a good man and a good friend and even at his most ‘difficult,’ w. was plenty of late years (as mine too, of course w. him), I loved and respected him, and I’m sure our recent political disagreements wd. have yielded to lengthy and unquiet discussions w. will never take place now. (‘Differences of opinion,’ he wrote in his last letter. ‘I certainly do not attach enough importance to political strife today to let it so much as come near my personal feelings.’)...

— Dwight Macdonald, Letter to Miriam Chiaromonte, 1972.

Dwight Macdonald is a figure that we think we know, well. He is widely considered, both within and outside the academy, as a one-man demolition team of the middlebrow—a modernist literary and cultural critique and high priest of taste whose condemnations of anything remotely resembling the commercial constituted a list far longer than his admissions of approbation.<sup>1</sup> Most existing scholarly studies addressing Macdonald situate him within broader trends characterizing the midcentury New York intelligentsia as they moved from the radical margins of New York

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*Unless otherwise noted, all quotes originating from Italian are my own translation.*

<sup>1</sup> Macdonald is often the subject of commentary, both scholarly and non. For a sense of public perception of Macdonald, see for instance, “Dwight and Left,” in *American Prospect* March 2006; “Rebel With a Cause,” in *Commonweal*, February 26, 2006; “Dwight Macdonald: Sunburned by Ideas” and “Dwight Macdonald Reconsidered” in *The New Criterion*, November 2001 and February 2012, respectively; “Browbeaten” in the *New Yorker*, September 5, 2011; “Style is the Man” in the *Atlantic*, May 2012; and “Dwight Macdonald at 100,” in the *New York Times* April 16, 2006.

life in the 1930s to its more moderate, even conservative, institutional center in the postwar years.<sup>2</sup> Like many of his formerly Trotskyist peers at *Partisan Review*, where he served as an editor from 1937 to 1943, Macdonald eventually rejected communism and gave up the life of the little magazine in favor of the economic security of writing for *The New Yorker*, and later, for *Esquire*. His limited-circulation, short-run magazine *politics*, which ran from March 1944 to December 1949, though widely noted for its innovative and anticipatory politics that bridged the Marxist Old Left with the postmodern politics of the New, is explained within this narrative as the period facilitating a shift from his early radicalism to a highbrow cultural position that obfuscated his previous politics with the pressures of the Cold War.<sup>3</sup> Signifying as a staunch modernist in the 1950s and early 1960s but as a radical in the 1930s and 40s, Macdonald is often regarded as having a “split personality” or a dissonant, “divided consciousness,” due to the perceived irreconcilability of his highbrow views and his radical politics, and at other times, he serves as a chief exemplar of the New York Intellectuals’ postwar process of “deradicalization” (Wreszin *Rebel* 457, 442).<sup>4</sup>

Nicola Chiaromonte, the friend and mentor Macdonald lamented so sincerely in the condolence letter above, instead is hardly remembered by English speaking audiences at all. Chiaromonte, an exiled Italian antifascist who spent years in France and the United States before

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<sup>2</sup> Amanda Anderson notes the prevalence of this trend to subsume personal histories into a grand narrative of the New York intellectuals as a group in which conservative elements underwrote leftist positions: “the fact that many New York intellectuals moved not simply to liberal but to conservative positions captures a common sense on the left that even the liberals were conservative. One cannot emphasize this too sharply: the axiomatic view on the left is that liberals are conservative. And the New York intellectuals as a socio-intellectual and cultural-political phenomenon seem to underscore this point in such a way that the actual content of their debates ends up getting nullified. The move from radical to conservative (or neoconservative) is seen as at once a personal autobiographical tendency and a historical trend, both of which reinforce each other and in turn justify a larger tendency to collapse liberalism and neoconservatism” (Anderson “Character and Ideology” 214-15). See also Hugh Wilford’s *The New York Intellectuals from Vanguard to Institution*.

<sup>3</sup> See for instance Sumner’s *Dwight Macdonald and the politics Circle*, which positions Macdonald as offering a communitarian alternative in the field of the postwar left that would eventually fail in the climate of the Cold War; he considers the magazine a “a bridge between radical generations, between ‘Old’ left and ‘New’” (Sumner 16).

<sup>4</sup> See for instance Genter, *Late Modernism*.

returning to Italy and becoming editor of the Congress for Cultural Freedom's Italian journal, *Tempo Presente* (Modern Times), is referenced laterally in just a few of the academic histories detailing debates of the 1940s U.S. left. When he is addressed, it is either as the character of Scali in André Malraux's novel *Man's Hope* or in relation to one of his many better-known friends and collaborators, including Macdonald, Malraux, Mary McCarthy, Albert Camus, Ignazio Silone, or Gaetano Salvemini. Largely neglected by scholarship in English, Chiaromonte has been largely consigned to Italian monographs narrating alternative, non-Marxist leftist traditions obscured by the ideological rigidity of the Italian postwar period, since despite notable roles as editor and critic, during his lifetime Chiaromonte was sidelined in the Italian intellectual scene by his political heterodoxy—disregarded as a moralizing (i.e., “religious”) liberal humanist or as a socialist deserter by an Italian Left for decades constituted by its ideological Marxist commitments and as too anti-Catholic by the Italian right (Marchesini 346).<sup>5</sup> “In Italy, his was an absolutely unusual perspective, both in reference to our prevalent form of anarchism... and in reference to the different liberal traditions that were nonetheless united under the flag of the state (minimal or maximal as that state might be),” making Chiaromonte's position a lonely one during the postwar and long 1960s—a period in which the Italian scene, “when it [wa]s not Crocean, [wa]s Marxist, [and] when it [wa]s not Marxist, [wa]s Catholic” (Adamo, Bettizia).

We do not know Macdonald, however, if we do not also know Chiaromonte—not only because of the profound influence that Chiaromonte had on Macdonald's thought, long before the latter discovered the social criticism of the Frankfurt school, but also because the intellectual and ethical vision that they shared helps to explain and contextualize Macdonald's supposed

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<sup>5</sup> For an introduction to Italian scholarship on Chiaromonte, see “La verità del dialogo: Un ritratto di Nicola Chiaromonte” in Matteo Marchesini's *Da Pascoli a Busi*. Also, *Nicola Chiaromonte, Ignazio Silone: L'Eredità di "Tempo Presente,"* edited by Fofi et al., and *Nicola Chiaromonte, Le verità inutili* by Stefano Fedele.

political incoherence. Both men are difficult to place politically because they were personalists: they had socialist roots but then vehemently rejected Marxism; they were staunchly non-Stalinist but not liberal; they took up radical and outlier causes but, devout modernists, were also susceptible to claims of being reactionary. This problematizing of postwar political categories, was expression of a personal politics conceived in response to the “broken world” thesis and the rise of massification. Experiencing 1945 as a sort of “year zero” for humanity that indexed a world in extreme moral crisis that had been totally failed by politics, they read use of the atomic bomb on civilians in Japan and increasing reports of Nazi barbarism as grave indications of an imperative for new thinking (Chiaromonte “On Camus”). In response, they turned to the ethical register and to forms of social organization like friendship, small-group communities, and networks, modelled off the resistance countercultures Chiaromonte had encountered in his flight from Nazi Europe. Emerging personally from their encounter with the war and discussions with exiles and emigres, Macdonald’s and Chiaromonte’s version of politics as ethics disavowed faith in science, progressivism, triumphalism, and bureaucratic collectivism—it was a turning away from large-scale forces and a teleological account of history to locate the basis of political action in moral intuitions and personal relationships. The small-scale, the subjective, and the group were at the heart of this personalism, which attempted to reconfigure ideas about responsibility in light of world historical events. Communities that grew spontaneously around shared values and interests, and which would help to safeguard and strengthen them, became Macdonald’s and Chiaromonte’s ideal for social life.

This vision was first elaborated in the pages of *politics*—the magazine that Macdonald edited and for which Chiaromonte served as intellectual guide, contributor, and talent scout. The periodical became a vehicle for introducing New York intellectual circles and *politics* readers to

a range of important European thinkers strongly influenced by the war and its implications, including Bruno Bettelheim, Simone Weil, Camus, as well as other important European social thinkers like Max Weber (*politics* published an excerpt of the first U.S. translation of his work by C. Wright Mills, introducing readers to his ideas of rationalization), Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, and Leo Tolstoy.<sup>6</sup> A gathering place for those who did not fit easily into the period's political camps, and a special home for many European exiles—including Victor Serge, Andrea Caffi, and Lewis Coser, among others, in addition to Chiaromonte—*politics* was moreover one of the first magazines to seriously confront the events and implications of the Holocaust and an early proponent of concentration camp literature.<sup>7</sup> In many ways, the magazine despite its short run seems an index of the most important trends in postwar thinking, especially since so many contributors—from Marshall McLuhan, Paul Goodman and Mills to Camus and Maurice Merleau-Ponty—went on to have long public careers and would later become important figureheads for 1960s U.S. radicals.

The magazine in this respect predicted later cultural moments. Indeed, even decades after its publication, its ideas continued to strike a chord. Hannah Arendt, for instance, observed in 1968 that, having “reread the forty-two issues which appeared from 1944 to 1949,” she found

so many of its articles, comments, and factual reports read as though they were written today or yesterday or yesteryear, except that the concerns and perplexities of a little magazine with a peak circulation of not much more than 5,000 have become the daily bread of newspapers and periodicals with mass circulation. For the issues, far from being outdated, let alone resolved, by the enormous changes in our everyday world, have only increased in urgency. (Arendt “Introduction”)

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<sup>6</sup> In this sense, I contend Mark Greif's claim that French existentialism was the entry point of the crisis of man discourse into the New York scene. See Greif, p. 68.

<sup>7</sup> For an account of its coverage, see “The Responsibility of Peoples: Dwight Macdonald and the Holocaust” in *Why We Fought: Forging American Obligations in World War II* by Robert B. Westbrook.

As Arendt recognized, *politics* remained historically relevant because it turned toward personal, subjective experience to find solutions for the broken postwar world—and understood that problem itself to constitute a social problem with profound moral implications needing to be worked out collectively. It moreover formally enacted its theories by trying to engage its readers personally, interweaving private and collective experiences and promoting dialogue in the hopes of creating a communal space. The magazine’s enterprise can thus be understood as a many levelled attempt to theorize *how to be personal* in the postwar world: how to reanimate social life through the personal associations and affiliations, intuitions and concerns they saw increasingly disavowed by a world organized around mass collectives.

*politics*’s conspicuous unfolding of Macdonald’s and Chiaromonte’s personalism raised outrage in the leftist intellectual circles of New York they frequented. Because of the close link between their thought and the magazine’s content, Macdonald and Chiaromonte were subject to serious personal accusations of “deradicalization” for their turn to the ethical and the small-scale during a period in which the U.S. intelligentsia was still deeply marked by Marxist views. Among the first in the early post war U.S. critical landscape to promote thinking that framed the historical moment as a moral crisis and addressed the war’s events as a social problem, they transported discussions of conscience and moral intuition from the private register to the pages of *politics*. This move implied a repudiation of Marxist paradigms, liberal triumphalism, and political pragmatism that was, as Aldo Garosci notes, *impolitica*, or impolitic, rather than anti- or apolitical as many peers argued, because in emphasizing the political arena’s accountability to ethical evaluation Macdonald and Chiaromonte were left engaging social life “from the other side of the conventions of opportunism” (Garosci).

Indeed, choosing the idiom of ethics, *politics* foreclosed the possibility for much that was considered judicious politicking in a postwar moment characterized by dramatic nationalism, bureaucratic collectivism, scientific socialism, and political realism. Rejecting abstract logics and thinking dependent on class or nation meant Macdonald and Chiaromonte instead championed ideals rooted in but resonating beyond the subjective horizon of the individual. While they were certainly defenders of the individual in the face of the massifying threat of the collective, they were at best problematic individualists in that they distinctly opposed the rational, objective subject imagined by the Enlightenment. “Personalizing” this individual so that she was defined by her emotions, imagination, moral feelings, and other forms of subjectivity, they positioned her against what Chiaromonte would later call society’s “egomaniacal inflation of the individual” (Paradox of History 147). Believing modern subjects to be perilously at the mercy of routinized, rationalized forces—they were people to whom things happened, rather than agents—Macdonald and Chiaromonte exhibited a clear agency panic that manifest as desire to liberate the individual from stultifying forms of social constitution. But this liberty was intimately tied to the social support of spontaneous, direct, and meaningful relationships with other people: groups and networks of friends sharing the person’s values and outlook that would enable her to heroically follow her conscience by sustaining her moral vision.

Macdonald and Chiaromonte thus imagined freedom from impersonalizing forces, not from obligation; liberty from collective responsibility that would enable personal responsibility—in this sense aligning themselves more with Gandhi than the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. This is not to say that their views entirely converged: their specific approaches to reparation of the moral crisis of the postwar world differed in emphasis. Macdonald essentially championed a form of radical humanism that attempted to locate in the

human conscience a form of absolute that would be both live and lasting. Chiaromonte instead looked to a more phenomenological concept of justice, understood as both immanent within situations and personally intuited. Despite these distinctions, they both insisted on a personalist politics of moral community that valorized the subjective, and it positioned them as outliers in an early postwar moment of hard-headed pragmatism and restraint.

By the early 1950s, with the magazine closed and the ethical domain it interrogated increasingly permeated by what seemed to be compromises made in the name of a moral imperative for Soviet containment, Macdonald, Chiaromonte, and many of their peers deemed their earlier group-based ethics and personal politics a failure. In resignation, their personalism migrated from the ethical to the aesthetic scene—in some ways without their notice. Indeed, the distinctly moral language of Macdonald's and Chiaromonte's *politics* vision was quickly translated into the discourse of cultural criticism and public intellectualism in the early 1950s, as they essentially worked to constitute the same small-group and community social formations as audiences organized by shared tastes and values. This move is often reduced to an expression of high modernist status-anxiety about the democratization of art. Remodeling their aspirational politics, so inspired by anarchism and twentieth-century European resistance movements, as a personal politics of taste seems to illustrate, as Miranda Joseph argues, that often “idealizations of community operate as conservative critiques of change in the given social hierarchy” (Joseph 6). Yet while their vision was in some ways dependent, as Chiaromonte would later write, on an aristocratic society, it was nonetheless in line with the thinking about community and personalism that they had experimented with while cultivating the audience of *politics*.

Indeed, while Macdonald's and Chiaromonte's commitments had always borne the risk of what Gregory Sumner calls “coterie elitism,” even in its new guise their personalism attempted

to reconfigure aspirational thinking about social forms and the bases of political action (Sumner 175). Their turn to aesthetics was not a sudden reactionary move (though, especially in the case of Macdonald, it is often understood this way) but was rather an extension of their commitments to the subjective and to rejection of the spread of bureaucratic collectivism. Criticism became a vehicle for countering how an impersonal ethos promoting standardization and ideology was evacuating even the aesthetic realm of those few capacities resistant to its reasoning: the imagination and the conscience.

This chapter will trace the evolution of Macdonald's and Chiaromonte's personalism, first articulated in *politics*, from 1944 until Chiaromonte's death in 1972—as both figures interfaced with a surprisingly wide range of intellectuals, political activists, writers and editors, and intervened in political and intellectual conversations in both the United States and Europe. Their cosmopolitan personalism is an important place to start this dissertation, as it demonstrates how the concept was imagined as a way of thinking politics outside the ideology of institutional and party politics. For Macdonald and Chiaromonte, the personal was a mode of recuperating the individual from the mass impersonalism of ideology by fundamentally situating that individual in community. Spanning the period of this dissertation, the transatlantic friendship between Macdonald and Chiaromonte served as an ongoing conversation, form of support, and site of return to this personal politics—even as that vision, and their friendship, were challenged by the events of the Cold War and long 1960s. Their relationship ultimately became the best practice of their personalism: bridging individual and collective life by continuously relating historical events to personal experience, their friendship manifested the sympathetic spirit and profound moral congruence, the form of meaningful sociality, that anchored their aspirations for political life.

## The Maestro of *politics Magazine*

“The fact, dear friend, is that if there is anyone who has real need of an injection of ‘metaphysics’ it is these Americans. Because they don’t have the habit of feeling wonder.”  
— Nicola Chiaromonte, Letter to Andrea Caffi, 1946.

Nicola Chiaromonte, born in southern Italy in 1905, arrived in New York in 1941 after spending years as an antifascist exile in France. A member of the Italian resistance group *Giustizia e Libertà* (Justice and Liberty)—which was home to a host of now well-known antifascists, including Carlo Rosselli, Carlo Levi and Leone Ginzburg—Chiaromonte had flown for André Malraux’s squadron during the Spanish Civil War and later clandestinely escaped the Nazi invasion of France by fleeing to North Africa, where he was befriended by Albert Camus and finally ended up on a U.S.-bound steamer. Upon reaching New York, Chiaromonte had already lived many of the Second World War’s trials intimately, losing his first wife and several friends in the process, and had developed a network of European antifascist contacts and collaborators.

While exiled in France, Chiaromonte had become acquainted, through the writer Alberto Moravia, a childhood friend, with Andrea Caffi. Caffi was an Italo-Russian anarchist anti-Stalinist revolutionary who had fled Russia after being arrested for criticizing the October Revolution. The immediate friendship that emerged between Chiaromonte and Caffi, which lasted the remainder of the slightly older Caffi’s lifetime, would become an important model for Chiaromonte’s belief in the possibility and promise offered by friendship. The close group of antifascists, including Renzo Giua and Mario Levi, that developed around Caffi and Chiaromonte in France during the Second World War, sustained by similar political and moral commitments, eventually split from the larger *Giustizia e Libertà* organization over disagreement on “the democratic tradition stemming from [Giuseppe] Mazzini and on its problematic nexus

with the fascist outcome of the [Italian] nation-building process” (Bresciani “Caffi and Chiaromonte”).<sup>8</sup> Believing that *GL*’s leader Rosselli was moving in the direction of restoring the old parliamentary democracy once fascism was defeated, Caffi and Chiaromonte “opened an ever-growing split from Rosselli” that was animated by desire to avoid restoring the preexisting parliamentary democracy and instead explore new political solutions for post-fascist Italy (Bresciani “Caffi and Chiaromonte”, Bianco “Interview”).

This break with the primary Italian antifascist organization in order to honor their political vision for postwar Italy exemplifies how groups constituted around similar goals and values had long been key to Chiaromonte’s political experience and were understood as a space premised on agreement and for maintaining ideals. Indeed, Chiaromonte was strongly influenced by his experience of the resistance networks that emerged during the 1930s and 1940s as countercultures and safe havens: he continued to return to his experiences as an exile in Paris, Marseille, and Oran, Algeria, remembering the hospitality and warmth of these bands of people who would seem to suddenly appear out of a void: “one would find a bed” and family-style meals, be quickly adopted into the life of the group. This idea of likeminded people who shared one’s vision for the world emerging in solidarity when the need arose continued to serve throughout his life as a keystone of his vision of political organization.

By the time the Nazi invasion had compelled Chiaromonte and most of his *Giustizia e Libertà* cohort to disband and leave France, he had already been significantly influenced by Caffi’s theories about sociability. Taught in Germany by Georg Simmel, Caffi likewise took up his teacher’s interest in social fragmentation and theorization of social life in terms of individual, pair, and small-group behavior—an emphasis on the small-scale rather than on society as a fixed

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<sup>8</sup> Giuseppe Mazzini was a main figure in the Italian *Risorgimento*, or unification into a single nation state.

whole that understood the individual to be constituted by interaction with others and social life to be constituted by free, even playful, forms of interpersonal association.<sup>9</sup> Insisting on the importance of making space for sociability to occur spontaneously outside of state-recognized frameworks like class or nationality, Caffi saw free associations as a form of resistance to the instrumental logics organizing the sovereign nation state (Bush 133). Caffi situated this conception of sociality, premised in interpersonal relationships freely engaged in and rooted in affinity and respect, as heir to the socialist intellectual traditions obscured by the dominance of Marxism (Bianco *Chiaromonte* 26).

Sharing much of Caffi's perspective, including his Platonist outlook and anxieties about European nationalism, Chiaromonte joined Caffi in espousing an anarchic politics based in this alternative socialism. Small groups premised in friendship and mutual respect would unite around common desires to change society. Caffi and Chiaromonte were highly skeptical of existing European socialist parties, which linked the concept of the masses to nationalism, and instead looked to intellectual predecessors of these parties who shared the same socialist ethical commitments but imagined a different type of politics that would operate outside the framework of the state. They looked especially to the thought of 19<sup>th</sup> century theorist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. Considered the father of the anarchist tradition, Proudhon was both a socialist and a moralist, concerned with voluntary and reciprocal relations and opposed to centralized state power. Aiming to anchor justice in truths about human social relations that were not limited to class, Proudhon's theory imagined social justice as a triumph of reason rather than revolutionary

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<sup>9</sup> See Gino Bianco, *Un socialista "irregolare": Andrea Caffi, intellettuale e politico d'avanguardia*. Simmel was marginalized during his lifetime in the German academy but he grew to be very influential on the development of the Chicago School of sociology—which served as the predominant U.S. sociological approach in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Interestingly, this group-based approach to thinking the social went out of style just as Chiaromonte entered the U.S. scene. For more on Simmel, see *Georg Simmel on Individuality and Social Forms* and *The Chicago School: Critical Assessments* by Ken Plummer. Simmel was later a prime object of study by Lewis Coser, a peer of Macdonald's who also contributed to *politics*.

violence (Chiaromonte “Proudhon Uncomfortable Thinker”). Encounter with Proudhonian thought indelibly marked Chiaromonte, who continued to return to Proudhon’s as a point of reference throughout his life—especially Proudhon’s concept of justice.

These ideas and commitments continued to resonate for Chiaromonte after he arrived in New York. Despite losing contact with Caffi during his flee from occupied France, Chiaromonte quickly introduced his mentor’s outlook, and the thinking of many of his resistance connections, to the New York intellectual scene. His main entry point into this world was Dwight Macdonald, whose acquaintance he likely made through fellow Italian, Niccolò Tucci, already an important contributor to Macdonald’s *politics*. The affinity between Macdonald and Chiaromonte was immediate and profound: after just a year of acquaintance, by early 1945 Macdonald had already named his youngest son Nicholas after Chiaromonte and was entirely taken by his new friend’s critiques of both European politics, American imperialism, and the prevailing ideologies of the international left. Yet it was August 1945, so-called Hiroshima summer, that their friendship was cemented. Vacationing together on Cape Cod, Macdonald, Chiaromonte, and other members of the New York intelligentsia, including Mary McCarthy, spent long evenings anxiously discussing the new tragic turn in world events. Years later, Macdonald and McCarthy would reminisce about that summer together on the Cape as an intellectual and political turning point in their lives. For Chiaromonte too the period came to represent an ideal: a time of earnest, simulating conversation about matters of great consequence, as the group discussed how to move forward in a world fundamentally marked by the crisis of the war.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> There is significant evidence—in their personal correspondence, published interviews, and the accounts of peers—of both the impact of Chiaromonte’s thought on Macdonald and McCarthy and of Chiaromonte’s nostalgia for the summers he spent with them on Cape Cod. A few selections: “Nicola, I’ve long wanted to tell you—and this seems a good occasion—that seeing you on the cape in the summer of ’45 was a crossroads in my life. In fact, the crossroads. I became a different person, though perhaps you didn’t notice it, and I only saw it myself after a time, looking back. This has convinced me—of something you don’t believe yourself—that change is possible for people. I mean inner change of course. All this sounds too redemptive, like Catholic literature for young people, but I

For all three, it was a moment of profound harmony of opinion and outlook even as the violent logics structuring the war seemed to foreclose any type of optimism. The events of the summer had actualized their fears about the destructive consequences of letting scientific progress and existing political roads serve as guiding ideologies. Lamenting the ways in which society was training individuals to think with the “moral callousness” of soldiers and scientists, the alignment of means and ends became for all three a moral imperative (Macdonald “The Responsibility of Peoples”). Though the actual conflict was coming to a close, the only hope for the future seemed to lie in hypothesizing political positions outside of the structures that had led to the war’s many forms of dehumanization. Looking backward in order to look forward, Chiaromonte introduced Macdonald and McCarthy to a tradition of non-Marxist European intellectual thought with which they were unfamiliar: not only Proudhon but also the libertarianism and anarchic socialism of William Godwin and Alexander Herzen, the classical liberalism of Alexis De Tocqueville, the philosophies of Simone Weil and Leo Tolstoy. In McCarthy’s word, Chiaromonte

introduced into our American circle something of Europe: a Europe different not only from America, but also from that other Europe that we had known up until that point only through Proust and Gide, the Europe of the modern novel. Nicola brought us ideas more

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haven’t time tonight to put it better. Anyway I am your convert.” (McCarthy letter to Chiaromonte, March 6, 1968, Chiaromonte Papers).

“I’ve learned a great deal from you, Nick, and you’ve changed my whole intellectual outlook (you and the atom bomb).” (Macdonald letter to Chiaromonte, April 1947, Chiaromonte Papers).

“For us he was a teacher. I don’t say only for myself, who at that time was a professor at the beginning of her career, but for everyone... With Nicola and with Dwight, but above all with Nicola, we spoke for entire evenings on Tolstoy and Dostoyevski and in those conversations he changed my life, in many ways... In terms of general influence, let’s say Nicola introduced into our American circle something of Europe: a Europe different not only from America, but also from that other Europe that we had known up until that point only through Proust and Gide, the Europe of the modern novel. Nicola brought us ideas more radical (in the sense we Americans give this word) and provided us, I don’t know how to put it, with the background, or better, the philosophical foundation of politics” (McCarthy preface).

“Well, dearest Dwight, we would need many a summer on Cape Cod to thrash out such questions. I wish it were still possible to have at least some substitute for them.” (Chiaromonte letter to Macdonald, Oct. 16, 1967)

“[M]y best summer vacations were the ones I spent in Truro in your company and Mary’s. How far away those days now seem. We must thank the Gods that our friendship has withstood the test of time” (Chiaromonte letter to Macdonald, August 9, 1963, Macdonald Papers).

radical (in the sense we Americans give this word) and provided us, I don't know how to put it, with the background, or better, the philosophical foundation of politics. (McCarthy "Preface").

He moreover introduced them to the work of acquaintances like Raymond Aron and of heterodox European thinkers influential in *GL* circles, like Alexander Herzen, Victor Serge, and Anton Ciliga (Bresciani "Caffi and Chiaromonte"). These intellectual encounters and corresponding conversations were so moving that Chiaromonte emerged from Hiroshima summer as Macdonald and McCarthy's *maestro*—and the inspiration animating *politics* as Macdonald began seeking a new direction for the magazine in the fall of 1945.

Like Chiaromonte, Macdonald and McCarthy had begun their careers in the Marxist camp, but by 1945 they were disillusioned Trotskyists more interested in the concept of political responsibility than in economic analysis. Chiaromonte's conviction that socialism could only succeed if it were reestablished on moral rather than economic grounds, and his skepticism of scientific progressivism, resonated with Macdonald's and McCarthy's disillusionment and disinclination to accept prevailing political tendencies. Moreover, Chiaromonte's utopian conviction that, in a historical moment like the present, the most reasonable course of action was to abandon massive political results—as a form of opposition to such rationalization of experience—became a model for the group. It was this relinquishment of immediate political efficacy in favor of commitment to the small scale that marked the group as utopian idealists.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> "[T]he term 'anarchism' indicates a galaxy of beliefs, opinions, ideas and arguments that too often are recapped and reduced under the label of a communist revolution. The anarchist path and more generally the libertarian ethos is much more variegated than one thinks and takes places along an intellectual-political arc suspended between two general poles of attraction: on one side sharing the revolutionary imaginary and gnostic-millennialism of the radical left tradition—in a significant way Jacobin, born with the French revolution—which, in substance, undertakes to substitute existence with another world, often imagined in a completely abstract mode, superimposing violence on the concrete network of the relations between men in the here and now. On the other side is a gradualist theory that, in a plurality of ways and modes (also in this more minor trend we have a proliferation of "schools"), supports separating the healthy part of society from the sick and the constitution of a counter-society that would function

“*Ecco* utopia. It is really this that we discovered through Nicola,” McCarthy would later write.

“One certainly cannot say that he was an optimist, but he always had a vision that was wider than others’ were. There was pessimism in him but also a great refinement of thought, along the grand, classical lines. This we did not have in America, at least as far as I know. His was a thought that was more generous than that which had circulated in our intellectual circles” (McCarthy “Preface”).

The utopian position was not one McCarthy took up uncritically, as she would later make clear in her satirical 1949 roman à clef *The Oasis*. Marking the tension between realism and idealism, McCarthy’s novella demonstrated how easily the utopian group model could fall apart if not underwritten by strongly shared principles: lacking consensus regarding its common values and approach, her fictionalized utopia implodes when its realist faction resorts to force that alienates the groups’ other members.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, for Chiaromonte, utopia always served as a heuristic, not a practicable politics, in the sense that, as he had discussed with Caffi a decade before,

there is no civilization without a multiplicity of utopias. But exactly that, without a multiplicity and not a singularity. This excludes the common interpretation according to which utopias must be realizable in order to be true. One could even say that, properly speaking, there is no such thing as a more or less realizable utopia, only more or less real ones, which is to say, utopias that are more or less intellectually perfect, harmonious and coherent. I mean that intellectual life is not at all opposed to life, not even in the Bergsonian sense, but rightly that whenever one does not live badly one lives on the intellect and on utopia (for example, in love, what does one do if not create a utopia?). (qtd. in Bianco *Chiaromonte* 11).

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contemporarily with an ideal model and...knows how to eliminate the putrefied parts and conserve those still fecund” (Adamo).

<sup>12</sup> Notably, *The Oasis* figures Chiaromonte as Monteverdi, the philosopher whose ideas serve as the impetus driving utopia but who remains absent and presumably disappointed by the groups misunderstanding of his vision. The novella reveals McCarthy’s cognizance of the profound agreement necessary to sustain the ideals she shared with Chiaromonte but also the inevitable failure of utopia when actualized too literally.

Defining utopianism as commitment to ideas that one knew could only ever be intellectually, but not practicably, perfect meant holding utopian realization in constant abeyance—with the knowledge that actualization would imply compromises inherently corrupting of the utopia itself, and therefore of its pedagogical role in orienting and guiding action. Instead, for Chiaromonte utopia functioned as a form of ideal that was indexed “whenever one does not live badly” (11). As such, it needed to be supported and sustained, held constantly aloft, but not proved true. It was real in a sense that exceed the context of any particular moment (11).

As a period of thrashing out such ideas, the summer of 1945 had a marked influence on Macdonald’s direction of *politics* going forward. McCarthy would later write that it was “really the influence of Nicola” that moved the magazine toward its “new libertarian line” (McCarthy “Preface” 11). By the summer of 1945, the magazine had been in circulation for about a year and a half, and while edited entirely by Macdonald was funded primarily by his wife Nancy’s trust fund. A small publication with about 5,000 subscribers, it had been founded after Macdonald split from the editorial board of *Partisan Review* and had garnered an enthusiastic response for its serious, critical approach to current events. The 5,000 printed copies of each issue usually passed through several sets of hands—usually those of young, male, college-educated New Yorkers but also of Midwest and West Coast readers as well as of servicemen (Sumner 37). In 1944, Macdonald wrote “that subscriptions were pouring in and ‘all kinds of people were being stimulated to write for it...Everyone seems to feel a terrible moral and intellectual void’” that *politics* was aiming to fill (Wreszin *Rebel* 141).

In its political coverage and commentary, *politics* was unswerving in its use of satire, the rhetorical strategy by which it conveyed its position of cynical idealism—perhaps most fully

embodied by the “Commonnonsense” column written by Tucci.<sup>13</sup> Tucci, who had spent years as a fascist adherent before becoming a staunch political skeptic, had by 1945 rejected all forms of ideological association. Bemoaning the lack of critical thinking he saw plaguing the era, his articles proclaimed that the autonomous individual had been dead for years. Allegedly characterized by Lionel Trilling as a man of “wide-eyed cynicism,” Tucci’s comic but highly critical *politics* contributions were an important bedrock for the magazine that served as an important vehicle for its tone. Often citing his past experiences with fascism and writing from a position of personal perplexity with the state of the world, Tucci rejected as dangerous any justification for separating ethics from politics (Tucci “Commonnonsense” *politics* Nov 1946). His discerning readings of how conceptions of the rights of man, increasingly reliant on the qualification of citizenship, had grown distant from the needs of actual individuals, Tucci’s satire, beholden to Johnathan Swift, exploited readers’ normative expectations, rhetorically reorienting his audience’s relationship to the official idioms of 1940s liberalism.<sup>14</sup> As such, Tucci’s satire symbolized the magazine’s desire to reorganize a world it did not like but nonetheless inhabited.

While *politics* had in this sense been invested in a skeptical idealism since its inception, and open to subjective accounts of political events like Tucci’s, in September of 1945, Macdonald explicitly set the magazine’s more explicitly personalist agenda when he wrote that

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<sup>13</sup> In addition to enjoying a friendship with Macdonald and Chiaromonte, Tucci was also a frequent correspondent of Caffi’s. Their correspondence suggests that Tucci felt intellectually isolated in the late 1940s after Chiaromonte, whom he considered a close friend, returned to Europe. Tucci’s letters charge Macdonald with lacking the willpower to politically enact the groups’ shared ideas after Chiaromonte’s departure. Tucci considered Macdonald more committed to obstinateness than to the ideas and ethics motivating Chiaromonte and Caffi (Tucci letters, Caffi archive).

<sup>14</sup> Tucci’s articles, which deserve more space than I can give them, anticipate the critique inherent to the concept of “bare life,” by satirically proposing the twentieth century the “Century of the Naked Man.” They also interrogate the nature of admirable concepts like human dignity in a world where the definition of human seemed laughably malleable.

“[p]ersonally, I consider few problems today as important as that of political morality” (Macdonald *politics* editorial comment, September 1945).<sup>15</sup> The first change this entailed was presentation in fall 1945 of the “Ancestors” series, which, originating from the intellectual introductions Chiaromonte had made to Macdonald and McCarthy over the summer, published important or illustrative essays by figures drawn from utopian socialism, 18<sup>th</sup> century liberalism, anarchism and pacifism. Almost exclusively Eurocentric in focus, the “Ancestors” articles tended to advocate a public sphere built on federations of small associations linked by minimal bureaucracy and based on voluntary membership, autonomy, and face-to-face relationships. Its most important pieces came from Proudhon, Weil, Tocqueville, and Tolstoy.

*politics* next introduced the “New Roads” series, a succession of articles that were paired with live group discussion sessions that were intended to open up space for criticism of the residual Marxism still dominant in the U.S. left. The series aimed to advance new approaches to what Macdonald considered the central problem of the era: how to move toward a society that would be “humanly satisfying” (Macdonald Editor’s Note to “New Roads in Politics” Dec 1945). Positioning the search for meaningful sociality at the heart of its program, “New Roads” showcased articles specifically engaging this problem, regardless of political tendency. “[A]greement on certain basic points” across articles by various authors, Macdonald argued, was especially “striking and seems to indicate that a considerable number of leftwing intellectuals in this country feel somewhat the same inadequacies in Marxism and are groping towards somewhat the same kind of alternative” (Ibid.). The “New Roads” pieces, with titles like

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<sup>15</sup> Lewis Coser describes his gratitude for the exile milieu that Macdonald and *politics* cultivate: “I was also grateful to Dwight because once you move into a new milieu and you feel accepted, half the battle is won. I wrote regularly for *Politics*, as did other refugees. I remember Peter Meyer, real name Joseph Guttman. He was a former Czech Communist. There was this brilliant Italian, Nick Tucci. Dwight and Nancy were enormously hospitable. They had a small apartment in the Village, and people would drop in all the time. I got to know Paul Goodman that way. Harold Rosenberg—probably also Meyer Schapiro. I also met Irving Howe, but only superficially.” (Coser 38)

“Toward a Personalist Socialist Ideology” and “Nonviolence and Revolution,” were attempts to recuperate the individual from the mass and to reintroduce her to concepts like social responsibility and political morality.

The “New Roads” articles were accompanied by two forms of conversation: the first, held in the pages of the magazine itself, was a section of commentary about the series penned by readers and other contributors; the second was a set of Friday Evening Discussion Meetings, initiated to accommodate “[a] number of readers [who] have suggested that some form of contact between the readers and writers of *POLITICS* more immediate than the printed page might be enjoyable and useful” (Macdonald editorial comment *politics* Nov. 1945). Macdonald, Chiaromonte, Paul Goodman, and Lionel Abel, among others, presented work at these discussions held in Greenwich Village during the fall of 1945. The meetings, usually hosting between 200-300 people, were attended by notable figures of New York intellectual life, including James T. Farrell, Harold Rosenberg, William Barrett, and Delmore Schwartz (*Bianco Chiaromonte* 75; Macdonald editorial comment *politics* Jan. 1946). After publishing about a dozen articles by various writers, “New Roads” was collapsed from an independent series into the format of the magazine itself, as its aims merged into the magazine’s overall objectives in 1947.

### **“New Roads”: Ethics as the New Radicalism**

“[Macdonald] seems to have discovered some imperfection in economics: this imperfection seemed curable with politics. He tried to cure economics with politics. But politics suddenly revealed that it was tainted. He tried to cure the taint of politics with morals. Now, morals is becoming tainted, and he threatens to fumigate morals with religion... *Politics* now claims that the social problem is reducible to a series of personal problems. Insofar as it proposes anything, it proposes that people become better, and sometimes, more sexually free.”

— James T. Farrell, “New Roads Discussion,” 1946.

*politics* magazine's "New Roads" certainly marked an ethical turn—one that generated a vociferous response from readers and interlocutors. Attempting to rethink radical politics in a manner that rejected both liberalism and Marxism rendered its intervention a scandalizing disruption in the field of the U.S. left. Insisting that morality should not be divorced from political discussion, that means should not be subordinated to ends, that history was not inherently teleological, and that scientific progress should not go unquestioned, the magazine directly opposed both what Amanda Anderson has termed the period's "bleak liberalism"—a highly cautious, realistic and rational liberalism skeptical of transformative politics—and the period's prevailing forms of social critique and radical thinking, which were beholden to Marxism.<sup>16</sup> While the period's political realists worked to distinguish objective truth and evidence-based fact from the 'prejudice' of subjective opinion or emotional thinking, *politics* challenged their commitments to pragmatism, concrete political programs, and analysis of power with a personalist assertion of the political relevance of non-rational faculties like the conscience. It also undermined the realists' clear demarcation between politics and other spheres of life. This move was read by many peers as synonymous with a retreat from politics into religion, from reality to obscurantism, and from the masses to elitism.

Chiaromonte's articles "On the Kind of Socialism Called Scientific" and "Remarks on Justice" and Macdonald's "The Root is Man" dramatize both the vision underwriting their "New Roads" and the charges against it. "On the Kind of Socialism Called Scientific," for instance, was an attack on Marxism as a failed theory that attempted to recuperate social justice from the socialist tradition by turning to foundational socialist thinkers who did not privilege economic

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<sup>16</sup> "[B]eyond the critique of progressive, rationalist optimism and the dangers it entails, there were two formative elements to the general framework of interwar, war, and early Cold War liberalism: a distinct emphasis on tragic limitation and negative forces, on the one hand, and an endorsement of democratic process, piecemeal reform, and limited or ad hoc political measures, on the other" (Anderson "Character" 219).

principles over moral ones. For Chiaromonte, justice was a complicated concept that was both social and absolute but certainly not based primarily in economics—deriving instead from aspects of lived experience that exceeded materiality and ideology. Combining these convictions with his ideas about utopia, Chiaromonte argued for a socialism grounded in “the possibility of non-realization” that would resist the temptation to consider itself a blueprint or key for making sense of the world (Chiaromonte, “Socialism Called Scientific”). Seeing socialism as a preconceived answer to social problems undermined the nature of ethical experience as something that needed to be struggled through—and it was this struggle, not the eradication of it, that might do “justice to human reality” (Chiaromonte “New Roads Discussion”).

Chiaromonte’s 1947 article “Remarks on Justice” went on to argue that, while justice was not merely an empirical or economic concept, nor could it be reduced to a matter of private conscience. Rather, for Chiaromonte justice indexed that which extended beyond individual consciences to their relations with others. It was a fundamentally social concern:

the question of justice arises when the fact of ‘being together’ (the social) is seen as an original part of the human condition, is acknowledged a reality of its own, and is not confused with the merely ‘subjective’ (what belongs to a given individual and to nobody else) or with the merely ‘objective’ and factual (what belongs to everybody in general, and to nobody in particular). (Chiaromonte “Justice”)

In this sense, justice for Chiaromonte was eminently and inherently personal, because it bridged the subjective with the objective: it linked the individual conscience and its collectively constituted reality, serving as “primary evidence that there is something in common between two men simply because they exist” (Chiaromonte “Justice”). What had disappeared from social life in the present historical moment of war and crisis was not “a sentiment like love” but this recognition that justice was not normative or abstract but immanent within situations and personally graspable by means of subjective modes of knowing (Chiaromonte “Justice”). This

situational conception of justice was far from the normative framework of equality before the law that liberals at the time were advancing, and which would eventually culminate in the UN Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, and it also turned away from the class-based vision of justice as economic equality cherished by Marxists. More personally experienced and context-dependent, this notion of justice also explicitly rejected pragmatic arguments that just ends validated unjust means: “Justice means *justice*, not the search for it” (Chiaromonte “Justice”). The condoning of prejudices and injustices practiced in the name of some future “just cause,” for Chiaromonte an index of Marxism, was a perversion of utopia through compromise with expediency.

Macdonald’s “The Root is Man” was personalist in a different way. Whereas Chiaromonte’s personalism was the point of contact between “the merely ‘subjective’” and “the merely ‘objective’” that defined “the human condition,” Macdonald instead worked to recuperate the individual as a social and political resource by personalizing her. A case for rejecting Marxism that was grounded in secessionist, anarchic libertarianism, “The Root is Man” was also an affirmation of feelings, desires, and the conscience as moral and political indices: it was a call to locate ethics in “what we living beings want, what we think and feel is good,” and to work toward approaching that directly in daily life (Macdonald “The Root is Man”). Arguing that “our ethical code is no longer *experienced*, but simply *assumed*, so that it becomes a collection of ‘mere platitudes,’” Macdonald endeavored to bring ethics closer to the lived experience of the person (Macdonald “The Root is Man”). Any inquiry into the good life should derive “from one’s own personal interests and feelings, working from the individual to society rather than the other way around,” so as to reduce “political action to a modest, unpretentious personal level” that might satisfy “here and now, the psychological needs and the ethical values of the particular

persons taking part in it” (Macdonald “The Root is Man”). Such an approach, grounding political action in personal experiences and needs, “makes much better sense in the present era than the Marxian relativist and historical approach”—as they were rooted not in the person but in class-based collectivisms and faith in state institutions.

“The Root is Man” moreover maintained that moral codes were fundamentally unknowable by the prevailing objective, scientific and pragmatic forms of reasoning promoted by most political logic. “My own view is that value judgments are real in...that they are in fact our ultimate basis for action whether we realize it or not, and that they belong to an order of reality outside the reach of scientific method” (Macdonald “The Root is Man”). In this sense, Macdonald made the Kantian argument that ethics belonged to the same special domain inhabited by aesthetic judgment and taste. Yet unlike Kant, he rejected the idea that either aesthetics or ethics were apprehended disinterestedly. Access to this domain was always very personal, and ideally would also dovetail with pleasure. Yet both moral and aesthetic judgment exceeded the subjectivity of individual sensibilities to index shared principles: “I think each man’s values come from intuitions which are peculiar to himself and yet—if he is talented as a moralist—also strike common chords that vibrate respondingly in other people’s consciences” (Macdonald “The Root is Man”). This is “a subjective, personal, even arbitrary process,” but at the same time, one which speaks to something surpassing that framework, since the ‘responding vibration’ was more than “the mores of the historical period in question” and pointed toward something held in common by people across time and space (Macdonald “The Root is Man”). In this sense, Macdonald’s conception of ethics purported to be both universal and relative, inhabiting the tension between values’ subjective emergence from the individual’s thoughts and feelings and their continued resonance across time. Essentially, Macdonald’s essay was an

attempt to situate humanist attachments so that they would emerging from the conscience rather than institutional frameworks. Imagined in this way, locating and acting on ethical values would require critical reflection and thoughtful attention to situations, processes that could be better negotiated and promoted through the support offered by the anarchic communities Macdonald supported—and, as we will later see, through aesthetic judgment.

The political formations proposed in “The Root is Man” reflected much of Chiaromonte’s influence: Macdonald advocated small group communities that would come together voluntarily; they would promote moderation and negativism—in the sense of pulling away from or obstructing the functioning of the state apparatus. Characterized by their dedication to smallness and to “unrealism,” or a non-pragmatic approach to politics, these groups would operate through careful commitment to the congruence of means and ends and allow for relationships based in face-to-face conversations and genuine personal sympathies. Indebted also to Goodman’s burgeoning theories about psycho-sexual liberation, Macdonald moreover argued that expressions of sexual freedom afforded political liberty. Following Goodman’s lead, he attempted to carve out an idea of a “selfishness” that made space for people to express and act in concert with their desires as a form of disavowal of society’s forced impersonalization.

This interest in “selfishness,” though adjacent to ideas about direct relationships that Chiaromonte shared, marked a fundamental distinction between Macdonald’s and Chiaromonte’s thought. Chiaromonte wrote in his feedback on Macdonald’s essay that he worried “The Root is Man,” in valorizing pleasure and rejecting the concept of repression, negated the possibility of ethics at all, because it suggested that all desires were morally valid. This, Chiaromonte contended, was tantamount to supporting moral relativity and acting as though “the question of good and bad” bore no relation to truths or constants existing outside the self:

I cannot explain your coming out so bluntly against “all ideologies which accept the sacrifice of the present in favor of the future” except by assuming that, in spite of the time and space devoted to it, you were not seriously interested in this debate about “ethics.” Which, in spite of what it may sound like to you right now, might well be to your credit as an individual interested in the immediate and concrete aspects of social life rather than in abstractions. But you will understand, I am sure, that to make such a statement as the above amounts to saying in so many words that one doesn’t give a damn about moral ideals. Morality, in fact, is nothing at all if it is not giving up something in the present in favor of not only the future, but even of the purely “ideal.” (Chiaromonte “Reading Notes, The Root is Man,” Macdonald Papers)

Macdonald later amended his article in agreement with Chiaromonte’s point, but he never totally renounced his belief that pleasure and morality ought to be more closely aligned. Indeed, Macdonald continued to argue that they importantly shared the same origin: human subjectivity. The question of the relation between pleasure, sacrifice, and morality remained throughout Macdonald’s life somewhat solved.

It is worth noting that these “New Roads” articles by Macdonald and Chiaromonte were indebted to Chiaromonte’s reestablishment of contact with Caffi after the war. Caffi’s letters to Chiaromonte, and later to Macdonald, were transformed into contributions to “New Roads” under the pseudonym “European.” A letter from France featured in the November 1945 issue of politics, for instance, observed and analyzed a social paralysis characterizing postwar Europe. Caffi attributed the postwar crisis that he was witnessing to a lack of “real relation between ‘mores’ and ‘morals,’ between immediate, intimate experience and the formulas or schemes (more or less abstract) which purport to express the reality of the world in which we live” (European “The Automatization of European Peoples”). A first-hand observer of the wave of nationalistic consolidation reorganizing Western Europe immediately after the war, Caffi’s correspondence stressed the disjunct between postwar public institutional transformations and individual experiences of postwar life. He perceived the historical moment as one in which “politics clearly appears as a substitute—often a derisive one—for the social, i.e. for whatever

substantial content as might be found in such notions as civilization, human dignity, equality and fraternity, as well as in the ideal of the spontaneous communion between men fully conscious of their human fate” (Caffi “Violence and Sociability”). Politics was a response to a problem that was first and foremost social.

Remaining dedicated to voluntary interpersonal associations as the foundation for a better postwar society, Caffi argued that

Today, the multiplication of groups of friends, sharing the same anxieties and united by respect for the same values, would have more importance than a huge propaganda machine. Such groups would not need any compulsory rule. They would not rely on collective action, but rather on personal initiative and effective solidarity, such as can be developed only by friends who know each other well. (Caffi “Violence and Sociability”)

This position, essentially the bedrock of Macdonald’s and Chiaromonte’s *politics* vision, attempted to distinguish between forms of collectivity, complicating the political role of the mass in the reconstruction of postwar France and Italy, as well as the US, with other formulations of sociality. It also implied an interrogation of the concept of “the people” increasingly becoming a rhetorical reference point for postwar nationalisms. Arguing that what was often mistaken for “the people,” an actual community, was instead the masses, a group constituted by temporary, superficial relations, Caffi theorized the “multiplication of groups of friends” as a way of peeling away from the mass to cultivate small communities better able to resist the coercive forms of fascism still circulating the postwar era (European “Notes on Mass Culture”). Taking up Caffi’s claim that the mass had become the unfortunate measure to which all other contemporary values were sacrificed—to the loss of particularity and singularity—Macdonald and Chiaromonte went on to underscore how the mass ideologies they saw spreading through the postwar world were built on empty, unquestioned truths. They envisioned their ethical turn as a means of undermining this process: “No one can assert oneself against the Mass idol [today] except by

achieving some kind of personal order and consistency, and by associating with people who share this attitude” (Chiaromonte “Prospectus for Politics,” Macdonald Papers). Getting personal with oneself and others was envisioned as a distinct response to the socially, politically, and morally destructive effects of the rise of the mass.

### **“Whither Politics?”: Responses to New Roads**

This intervention was largely misrecognized by the late 1940s U.S. intellectual scene. The personal politics endorsed by “New Roads” threatened prevailing notions of radicalism and political intervention for the cosmopolitan U.S. left. To many, interest in morality seemed tantamount to finding God, so *politics*’s ethical turn was regarded as an embrace of religion despite the magazine’s unequivocal disinterest in questions of theology and divinity. “It was, oddly enough,” Macdonald would later write, not the rejection of Marxism but “the emphasis on morality that caused the most scandal” among peers (Macdonald, *Memoirs* 30). This response was reflected reviews of the magazine like those by *Life*, which filed *politics*’s articles under section headings referring to religion (Macdonald “Politicking” Jan. 1946). Postwar intellectuals dismissed Macdonald’s and Chiaromonte’s retheorization of the relation between the individual and the collective, because their philosophical and moral idiom challenged existing conceptions of the basis for and objective of political intervention.

Because Macdonald and Chiaromonte interrogated non-empirical aspects of existence and challenged the predominance of sociological social critique, their peers on the left considered them escapists who had ceded politics to philosophy. Indeed, *politics* received a particularly negative response from Macdonald’s former colleagues and political allies at *Partisan Review* (*PR*), who “reproached *Politics* for allegedly substituting ‘moral uplift’ for

‘political realism’” (Macdonald *Memoirs* 30).<sup>17</sup> Indeed the *PR* circle, inhabiting the same social and intellectual milieus as Macdonald and Chiaromonte, was highly critical of “New Roads”—a fact Macdonald partially attributed to belief that *politics* was contributing to what Sidney Hook had identified as the “new failure of nerve” (Macdonald *Memoirs* 30). Hook, an influential figure for the direction of *PR*, had studied under John Dewey and was committed to rationalism and political pragmatism. Following Hook’s lead, the *PR* editors framed *politics*’s criticisms of rationalism and reliance on philosophical speculation a form of moral “mysticism” synonymous with lack of political commitment. This political failure carried particularly worrisome social implications, they believed, because it misrecognized the power of science (Anderson “Character” 219). Upholding in the early postwar years what was essentially a progressive political line of strategic compromise that privileged expediency and practical results, the *PR* editors had a fraught relationship with their Marxist past, but preserved these roots in the form of a sociologically motivated political and social analysis attached to Marxist concepts (Wilford 150; Anderson 220). Thus, *politics*’s categorical rejection of Marxist critique suggested to the *PR* editors a retreat from politics: there did not seem to be another recognizable way of taking up a leftist stance (Wilford 150).

There were also differently grounded protests by peers like the inveterate Trotskyist James T. Farrell, who argued that *politics* was out of touch with the working-class struggle, bereft of a concrete political program because it was not concerned with the dispossessed. This charge opened up Macdonald and Chiaromonte to considerable reproach for social and political irresponsibility. Farrell openly scorned Macdonald’s “flightiness”—his quick progression from

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<sup>17</sup> *PR*’s Philip Rhav wrote “Disillusionment and Partial Answers,” for instance, as an oblique response to Macdonald’s “The Root is Man,” negatively referencing an ex-Communist who had been reduced to absolute moralism and utopianism (Sumner 165).

Trotskyist to moralist—suggesting that none of Macdonald’s political commitments ran very deep (Farrell “New Roads Discussion”). Similarly, Lewis Coser likened the New Roaders’ “[c]oncern for morality and justice” to “an inoffensive hobby” that bolstered the structures of power underwriting the status quo and ignored the plight of the working class (Clair “Digging at the Roots, or Striking at the Branches?”). Such charges of conservatism and disengagement were not unfounded: Macdonald and Chiaromonte did harken back to a set of lost moral ideals, and they were actively moving away from existing definitions of economic justice. Yet their rejection of the status quo of social life and desire for change by means of non-institutional channels also marked them as radicals, albeit isolated ones.

Thus alienating both New York’s moderate progressives and its radical leftists, *politics* also took aim at the burgeoning national liberal consensus, contending that faith in institutional guarantees for human rights and gradual reforms were leading to moral vacancy. For Macdonald and Chiaromonte, the liberal consensus in both the U.S. and Western Europe appeared a conflation of platitudes and state ideology that employed commercial techniques to popularize what seemed to them hollow ideas—an insidious merging of citizens into official state cultures (Macdonald “Henry Wallace II”). Assuming such a stance, Macdonald and Chiaromonte concomitantly positioned themselves outside early postwar liberal initiatives to extend access to the political table—in this way too they were perceived as uninterested in the dispossessed.

Despite the strong protestations against its alleged “mysticism,” there was nonetheless common ground between *politics* and many of its interlocutors. Firstly, Macdonald, Chiaromonte, and the *politics* cohort whole-heartedly shared their peers’ anti-Stalinism: critique of tyrannical collective bureaucracy, dogmatic ideology, and threats of force clearly stood against the heart of their vision. Secondly, several pieces published in the magazine, including

Bruno Bettelheim's "Behavior in Extreme Situations" and many articles *politics* translated from French publications, became highly influential on the New York Intellectuals' postwar discourse. *Politics*, for instance, was the first U.S. magazine to publish Camus's "Neither Victims nor Executioners," which Macdonald translated in 1948. The magazine was also responsible for introducing the thought of Simone Weil to U.S. audiences, beginning in 1945 with "The Iliad, or the Poem of Force," which was first translated by McCarthy. Weil's essay was one of the magazine's most important contributions to postwar intellectual life. An analysis of Homer's poem that appealed to a universal vulnerability to fate, it criticized the hubris evidenced by war and scientific progress and championed a lost ethos of human limit premised in Greek thought (Sumner 60). Restraint, limit, and hubris, which had been important tenets for the magazine since the advent of the atomic bomb, also became increasingly important to the outlook of the wider U.S. postwar left as the political tendency of the early postwar years toggled between this "tragic ethos" and a form of pragmatic politics that enshrined realism (Anderson "Character" 219).

It is worth noting that even those explicitly interested in questions of ethics espoused this culture of realism. While sharing the New Roaders' emphasis on human limit and interest in the living out of morality, figures like Lionel Trilling and Reinhold Niebuhr, for instance, advocated a moral realism that rejected *politics*'s disavowal of moral compromise and utopian notions of community as escapism.<sup>18</sup> For Trilling, Niebuhr, and others, the fact that politics were inherently corrupting of moral intention was part of what defined the struggle of moral choice: it was reductive and irresponsible to imagine practicing a morality not constrained to negotiate the relationship between means and ends or to compromise in the name of a greater good.

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<sup>18</sup> Niebuhr, a Christian realist, believed perfection on Earth was impossible and highlighted human limit and sin, which he saw as inherently corrupting. Similarly, Trilling advocated a secular moral realism, championing a morality "attentive to caution in the face of instrumental action, [which] privileges hesitation over commitment and complexity over action" (Anderson "Postwar Aesthetics" 435).

Despite the overwhelmingly critical response to “New Roads” within the U.S. intellectual community, Macdonald’s analysis of reader feedback and the letters to the editor that he published suggest that the robust response to the magazine’s new direction was not entirely negative. Dissenting readers tended to agree with the larger intellectual community, complaining that the “New Roads” were in fact old, failed routes of utopianism and moralism (“The Intelligence Office” July 1946) and that “articles in the ‘New Roads’ series, and others like them, have nothing to do with the world in which any sort of politics goes on” (“Whither Politics?” May 1946). For some readers, the magazine had become tedious, abstract, mystical, elitist, and “obsessed with private political morality” (“Whither Politics?”). Many moreover complained that the “New Roads” articles were too philosophical for a general audience.

Yet even with the loss of some early subscribers, the magazine continued to find readers, and those who stayed with *politics* were generally favorable to its new direction.<sup>19</sup> What appealed to them was the magazine’s desire to enact formally the ethics it envisioned thematically by making the publication as communal and personal as possible for its audience. Indeed, *politics* was itself an experiment in personalization. As it theorized the pivot between the value of the individual and the importance of group solidarity, the magazine also worked to create an interactive, likeminded community by facilitating discussion of social concerns that simultaneously encouraged “personal growth” (Macdonald “The Questionnaire” May 1947).

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<sup>19</sup> A questionnaire investigating reader responses found “a generally favorable reaction [among retained readers] to the New Roads series... About half of the replies here were definitely favorable, with the other half about evenly divided between neutral and definitely hostile. Some typical reactions: ‘avid interest and simultaneous personal growth’; ‘best contribution I have read anywhere on the need for a systematic understanding of government and the individual’ (manufacturer); ‘idea was excellent, writing was sometimes terrible; they would have been excellent had they been livelier’; ‘one of the most valuable things you have done although some of it was almost unreadable’; ‘never got beyond the first fork’ (clerk); ‘big wind in an empty house’ (exporter); ‘moonshine radiating from below’ (Republican lawyer); ‘by the time I had figured out some of the sentences, I had forgotten the points being made’ (teacher); ‘it was so over my head that I could read it with the radio going’ (mine worker)” (Macdonald “The Questionnaire” May 1947).

Towards the end of the magazine's tenure, Macdonald wrote T.S. Eliot that he hesitated to terminate the magazine completely, because the reader outcry following his announcement about the final issue had demonstrated just how much *politics* had signified for readers as a singularly personal space:

many of them—more than I'd realized—seem to feel that Politics was valuable to them in a personal, unique way. So I feel that more of a group, an audience has been created than I'd thought, and it would be a pity not to continue the relationship later on—such relationships being so rare and difficult in our dehumanized commercial culture. (Macdonald, letter to T.S. Eliot, November 1948, Macdonald Papers)

As a site for exchange and conversation among those who, as Arendt would later write, “no longer fit into any party or group”, the magazine essentially modelled the community format that it's writers advocated, interweaving individual and collective experiences and promoting dialogue in the hopes of creating a communal space.

It moreover formally enacted its theories by trying to engage readers personally, integrating reader comments and subjective accounts of collective experience into its pages. A personal vehicle for Macdonald's and Chiaromonte's ideas, sometimes referred to, even by Macdonald himself, as a “one-man show”, *politics* was nonetheless highly conscious of its audience as a community. As editor, Macdonald was exceptionally responsive to readers, often dependent on their engagement for content: letters, both to the editor and to the general *politics* audience, were regularly responded to, often at length, and incorporated into the body of the magazine. Soldiers' letters were treated as valuable reporting during the war years, displayed as important war coverage. Moreover, a reader questionnaire conducted by C. Wright Mills in 1947 was thoroughly analyzed and cited by the magazine several times. In fact, when the questionnaire revealed complaints that, despite a general appreciation for its work, the magazine seemed at times *too* personal—in that it sometimes lapsed into individual prejudices and jargon

illegible to the general audience—Macdonald vowed to improve his editing and add more prefatory, contextualizing introductions (Macdonald “The Questionnaire”). The inclination to engage and include readers was also reflected in the “New Roads” discussion sessions Macdonald had organized in Greenwich Village: those meetings, which actively avoided the lecture format, were conceived in response to readers’ requests for a live forum for conversation.

The spirit of community that animated Macdonald’s approach to editing *politics*, however, was perhaps nowhere more evident than in his editorial notes, which were incredibly honest about his own personal feelings about and experiences with the magazine. Macdonald often directly alerted readers to his difficulties in producing the publication and his written contributions to it in a timely manner, and he provided detailed explanations of many of his editorial decisions. In this way, the magazine resonated as personal on several levels: connecting Macdonald’s and Chiaromonte’s personal feelings about the production process, wartime events, and past experiences to the community represented by the audience of the magazine and directly involving that group in the ideas developing in the magazine’s pages. These endeavors were explicitly framed as a sort of response to the lack of meaningful relationality and impersonalization that Macdonald and Chiaromonte saw characterizing postwar social life.

### **Europe-America Groups and the Failure of Utopia**

“With the rapid devaluation of stalinism in Europe, more and more people reach the conclusion we have reached, namely that a ‘negative’ attitude is better than a positively false one. Hence, they fall back on some kind of ‘private’ existence, with only occasional contacts with the world of politics. But the question of a purposeful social existence still remains to be solved. I haven’t solved it at all, so I had better stop.”

— Chiaromonte, Letter to Macdonald, 1947.

After 1947, *politics* began to lose steam. It reduced to quarterly publication in 1948 and was suspended in 1949, as the burden of single-handed editorial management of the magazine

overtook Macdonald's energy and financial reserves. Chiaromonte's move to Europe in late 1947 had been a major blow to Macdonald's morale, which was accentuated by objective political circumstances as the U.S. political scene rigidified after the Berlin blockade (Macdonald "Prospectus for Politics"). Macdonald's and Chiaromonte's general sense that the political field was becoming increasingly barren—as an atmosphere of return to war permeated New York and consensus-building governments spread across Europe—was mirrored in despair over the state of their private lives. As Macdonald struggled with direction of the magazine and Chiaromonte's search for work compelled him to take a desk job at UNESCO, there seemed "no way of ACTING on [their beliefs] in a politically significant manner" (Macdonald "Prospectus for Politics"). This explained, Chiaromonte wrote Macdonald in 1948, "why so many people who meddle with politics, are persuaded that the only serious thing is to be a minister" (Chiaromonte letter to Macdonald, Sept 3 1948, Macdonald Papers).

Macdonald, McCarthy, and Chiaromonte had attempted in 1947 to reimagine a version of *politics* that might reanimate both it and Macdonald. Experiencing a high turnover rate in contributors, Macdonald lamented that his independent editorial direction of the magazine, with only the departing Chiaromonte for support, did not function as more of the type of group that the magazine itself envisioned, which he believed would better allow for constructive criticism and encouragement (Macdonald "Prospectus for Politics"). Chiaromonte's suggestion was to return *politics* to its more journalistic roots, moving away from theoretical discussion back toward engagement of the present through the register of personal experience—commenting on events, as the soldiers' reportage had, through subjective firsthand accounts. In this way, Chiaromonte argued, the magazine would be able to tell the truth about the world without taking up American or Russian state positions. He suggested new mantras for the magazine in phrases

like “The Revival of the Particular. The Positiveness of Negativism. The Importance of Not Being Earnest” (Chiaromonte “Prospectus for Politics”). These ideas would serve as the basis from which he began directing *Tempo Presente* with Ignazio Silone years later—but they did not succeed in keeping *politics* alive past 1949.

Macdonald seriously considered moving the magazine to Europe. The move seemed to make sense considering Macdonald’s and Chiaromonte’s divergence from the realism of their U.S. peers. *politics* was in fact far closer in outlook to dissident schemes that emerged from the postwar European left—particularly those of Chiaromonte’s friend, Camus, whose work in France during the late 1940s with the newspaper *Combat* attempted to cultivate a non-Communist European left through a turn to small-group action that followed similar lines to *politics*. This trans-Atlantic resemblance is unsurprising not only given *politics*’s Euro-centered perspective, but also given the shared resistance network that had linked Chiaromonte and Camus during the war. This similar outlook was a driver of the attempted partnership with Camus that constituted one of *politics*’s last initiatives: the Europe-America Groups (EAG), which aimed to create an international network of like-minded communities of activists and intellectuals.

The EAG—supported by the magazine and spearheaded by Macdonald, Chiaromonte, and McCarthy—framed rejection of political opportunism as a new form of internationalism. Believing that linking groups of thinkers and activists into a network that upheld shared goals might create the kind of leftist internationalism not seen since the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, the EAG was imagined as a “resurgence of a true international spirit, that is the establishment of connections between people who do not only reject nationalism, but intend to reject the national divisions between men” (Chiaromonte letter to Macdonald, Sept 3 1948).

Encouraging the possibility of new, more “‘radical democracy’,” the EAG seemed a way to buoy and give new life to *politics* through alliances with others sharing its vision (ibid.). Advancing an anti-Stalinist position, the EAG laid out objectives that nonetheless looked more anarchic than democratic: a federative “center of information and contacts based on a few simple principles” that would act “against nationalism and authoritarianism, both in America and in Europe” and “revive the opposite ideals both by words and by acts of solidarity and mutual help” (ibid.).<sup>20</sup>

Camus, who had visited with Chiaromonte and his *politics* colleagues several times during his trip to New York in 1946 for his “The Human Crisis” talk at Columbia University, was an early enthusiast of the initiative. Macdonald and McCarthy soon after began soliciting additional support and funds, beginning within their New York intellectual milieu. Working for UNESCO in Paris, Chiaromonte began investigating other potential French partners and was relatively optimistic about the interest he saw in the project on the other side of the Atlantic.<sup>21</sup> He cautioned, however, that it was imperative to envision the enterprise as “truly independent from any Government influence,” since doubts about the Truman Doctrine’s influence in European politics was producing many skeptics: “About the Stalinist question, you must understand one simple point: whenever an American makes of Stalinism the center of his preoccupations, he is

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<sup>20</sup> “The two general principles you propose for EAG—Internationalism and Radical Democracy—seem OK to me, though I think the latter should be phrased differently. Maybe Libertarianism, though its awkward sounding. Don’t like ‘democracy’ these days: rule of the people, suggests Hitler’s People’s Courts and Stalin’s People’s Governments, also Wallace’s debased kind of populism. Emphasis now should be on individual rights not collectivism and majorities....” (Macdonald to Chiaromonte, Sept 14, 1948, Chiaromonte Papers).

<sup>21</sup> “Besides the twelve days I spent in Toulouse with Caffi (European), and which were profitable also from the point of view of the E/A, I have done everything I could, in Paris, to begin to understand what is going on here, politically, and also intellectually. The first conclusions I reached, (or rather, the conclusions that were suggested to me by the conversations I had with people stringing from Camus to Rosmer, and from Sartre to left-wing Catholics) are contained in a 20 page report which I have just finished, and which will reach you very soon (following Miriam’s diplomatic suggestion I gave the manuscript to Sidney Hook to read and comment upon. I shall get his opinion in a couple of days.) Another report on the European situation, and the possibilities of a real collaboration between American and European intellectuals is being prepared by Caffi in Toulouse. It will certainly be a substantial document. I feel confident that the two documents will at least offer a basis for discussion...” (Letter from Chiaromonte to McCarthy, July 8, 1948, Macdonald Papers).

likely to be considered simply a conformist. Such is the effect of the Truman doctrine” (Letter from Chiaromonte to McCarthy, July 8, 1948). Chiaromonte’s reports from France urged his New York counterparts to make the EAG’s position as specific as possible, so that it would be legible to European allies as independent of state policies and thus gain genuine interest from the “people stringing from Camus to Rosmer, and from Sartre to left-wing Catholics” with whom he was meeting to discuss it (Chiaromonte, Letter to McCarthy, July 8, 1948, Macdonald Papers).

But the atmosphere in New York was one of heightened anxiety, and while Macdonald and McCarthy agreed with Chiaromonte’s analysis, the others they enlisted to participate in the EAG, including the editors of *PR*, were interested in the initiative primarily as a vehicle to counter Stalinism. In fundraisers and group meetings, Macdonald and McCarthy struggled to reconcile the pragmatic political aims of the *PR* faction with their own ideals about internationalism, and ultimately failed to locate the requisite agreement over values and objectives necessary to get the EAG off the ground. In-fighting among the New York intellectuals was not unusual, but it seemed to underscore the impossibility of that community ever becoming the kind of supportive group they envisioned.

Publication of McCarthy’s *The Oasis* did not help any. The literalness with which McCarthy’s satirical utopia mapped onto the conflict between the *politics* cohort and the *PR* faction of the EAG elicited many hurt feelings and nasty responses, isolating McCarthy in the New York intellectual scene. In a letter to Chiaromonte, McCarthy professed

a deficiency of political interest here [in New York] at the moment... The few people we’ve seen since we’ve been back, the Macdonalds, Delmore, the Nabokoffs, Elizabeth, Vergil Thomson, have uttered hardly a political word; neither have we... A repressed presentiment of war, it seems to me, accounts partly for this slap-happy state of things... The ideas you speak of in your letter to Dwight, internationalism, radical democracy, could gain considerable adherence theoretically—after all, that is what most people want—but many or most people, I believe, consider that it is too late to hope for them. It is not even a question of realism, of the Partisan Review brand, but of

defeatedness... There is a good deal of ugly feeling around, partly personal in my case...I am on extremely bad terms with the Rahvs and every attempt at an amnesty has led to further provocations. Also, Sidney Hook came back from Europe furious, according to Philip, because you (I quote) had given all the Europe-America money to Camus, who (further quote) doesn't need it anyway. This is so disingenuous that words fail me, but as you see, it does not foretell an autumn of fruitful collaboration. We will try the course of patience that you suggest, but I am not hopeful, and indeed, as I wrote Dwight, I don't see how the group can really function if this internal spitefulness continues... (McCarthy, Letter to Chiaromonte, October 6, 1948)

And indeed, lacking a communal group spirit, the EAG did not function. By the end of 1948, Macdonald confessed to Chiaromonte that the New York contingent of EAG was completely moribund, after being troubled by months of contentious group meetings in which attempts to specify the group's position had only produced conflict and apathy. As in McCarthy's *The Oasis*, lacking sufficient agreement about motivating principles, the form of association *politics* envisioned never produced much sense of community or gained any momentum. Though Chiaromonte remained hopeful the EAG might reemerge later in a new form if it located participants more aligned in feeling and objective, the project was essentially recognized by all involved as a failed effort, undermined by its Cold War political context and insurmountable personal animosities.

On top of this defeat, Macdonald and Chiaromonte, assuring each other of their continued devotion in letters crossing the Atlantic, struggled to reconcile themselves to mounting political tensions that seemed pointed toward return to war. Feeling isolated in New York, especially without Chiaromonte, and alarmed by forebodings of an imminent conflict between the USSR and Western democracies, Macdonald felt by 1948 "driven to the conclusion that the East really IS black as compared to the West's grey... Do help me out, Nick!" (Macdonald letter to Chiaromonte Sept 14, 1948). The heightened political situation problematized for Macdonald what had once been a strong conviction that means and ends should always align, opening the

door to a moral realism he was hesitant to accept and making “political questions seem more insoluble than ever” (Macdonald letter to Chiaromonte Sept 14, 1948).<sup>22</sup> Chiaromonte, likewise fearful the world was gearing up for war before having made sense of the last one, remained more convinced that opposing World War Three was a moral obligation.<sup>23</sup> He urged Macdonald that “exposing the monstrous inertia with which the Governments are heading for war,” and revealing their hypocrisy and wrong thinking, was now more than ever a moral imperative (Chiaromonte letter to Macdonald October 15, 1948).

Yet his commitments increasingly represented a lonely position. Indeed, unhappy in France, Chiaromonte’s brief return to Italy also proved disappointing, as fascists still retained positions of authority in a range of political parties and the Italian Communist Party was increasingly making a mass appeal to the Italian populace. This political landscape was unified by the rise of a new nationalistic rhetoric, indebted to the Resistance, that was non-partisan and tended to obscure the lingering hold of fascism, “both as an inherited apparatus of laws and officials, and as an openly proclaimed creed and movement” (Anderson, “Invertebrate Left”). A reconstituted version of “the Fascist party was soon sitting in Parliament again, and eventually received into the establishment under its leader, Giorgio Almirante” (Ibid.). Meanwhile, as the U.S. helped fund a Christian Democratic conservative victory in 1948, directing Marshall Aid

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<sup>22</sup> “So there seem two alternatives: (1) turn one’s back on politics; (2) if one continues to relate one’s self to politics, then to do so within the bounds of what is possible today, right now or in the near future, that is, to cease applying ultimatist standards to political actions... If one adopts the second alternative, one can still refuse to make an ultimatist choice... and limit one’s self to a choice of immediate, impure means which show some promise later on of getting to your ends. (But this bring up the old means and ends business, and I thought that was settled; there seems no end to the complexities once one tries to face things, these days....)” (Macdonald letter to Chiaromonte Sept 14, 1948).

<sup>23</sup> “Doing something effective against war implies first of all, exposing the monstrous inertia with which the Governments are heading for war, applying for the third time the same methods, starting from the same postulates of nationalism, struggle for power, robber-economy, expediency, etc., incapable of anything that could be called I don’t say reason or justice, but even a ‘policy,’ in the sense of clear aims and purposeful action” (Chiaromonte letter to Macdonald October 15, 1948).

toward fracturing and neutralizing the Italian communist coalition, the Italian Communist Party was nonetheless becoming a mass nationalistic movement as it “rescinded pre-war hardheaded Bolshevism for reconciliation with liberalism” (Eley 302, 290, 233). Cultural canonization of Gramsci marked the centrality of the PCI to Italian society, as even intellectuals previously identifying as Fascist looked to the Communist Party for legitimacy (293). In this sense, the landscape on both right and left in Italy seemed committed to nationalization and the political potential of the mass. With little discursive space for non-Communist leftist thought, Italy seemed a desolate landscape for Chiaromontian personalist idealism.<sup>24</sup> The EAG a failure, *politics* magazine defunct, and Macdonald sliding toward the realist’s classic divorce of ethics from politics, by the end of the 1940s Chiaromonte felt demoralized by the foreclosure of possibility on all fronts.

### **Utopia Meets the Cold War. Or, Ethics through Style.**

“I’ve noted of late months that I can read the Times in about 20 minutes, v. an hour previously, and that I clip only one or two things at most and often not any at all (as v. a dozen previously). Is this because I am ‘escaping’ from history? Or is it because history seems to have settled into a routine jog-trot in which repetition is the keynote? Like a ballet – one done by a rather unimaginative choreographer – in which each successive position can be foretold by the previous one. History seems to be ‘marking time’ and statesman to be ‘going through the motions.’”

— Macdonald, Letter to Chiaromonte, undated (likely 1951).

Macdonald’s concern that he was escaping from history was likely a tongue-in-cheek reference to the charges made against him and Chiaromonte years earlier, but his turn to the arts as a metaphor for his experience of the political in the early 1950s is indicative of the direction

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<sup>24</sup> Chiaromonte observed his out-of-stepness with the political orientations around him, and his consequent difficulty in getting published. “I am amazed at myself,” he wrote Macdonald, “my present position must be almost perfect, mustn’t it, in order to displease both PR and the reluctant antistalinists of the Sartre group?” (Chiaromonte letter to Macdonald Dec 1948).

his thought took during that decade. Aesthetics, like ethics, seemed a way of moving outside the increasingly inelastic ideological allegiances flooding the political field and a social world that bordered on despairing: “The intellectual and spiritual atmosphere here hasn’t improved at all since you left—and it was bad enough then. Lots of intelligent and decent people, lots of knowledge and culture, but all disorganized, without connections or interrelations—so that unless one feels on top of the world, and so able to make one’s own one-man culture so to speak...one just gets tired and depressed and rootless-feeling” (Macdonald letter to Chiaromonte, undated, likely early 1950s Chiaromonte Papers).<sup>25</sup>

Unsure how to hold onto their commitment to ethics and to the group within an atmosphere of fraught nuclear tension, Macdonald and Chiaromonte both turned to the cultivation of audiences with shared tastes and values as a way to reconfigure their model of political communities. Premised in convictions about the social obligations of intellectuals, this move mapped Macdonald’s and Chiaromonte’s ethical concerns more explicitly onto their anxieties that subjective modes of apprehending experience and non-rational modes of thought were being extinguished by Cold War ideological rigidification. As the Cold War promoted political logics that seemed to demand a collective suspension of conscience, Macdonald and Chiaromonte reimagined their personal politics by others means. Macdonald translated his ethics into trenchant criticism of cultural values, while Chiaromonte took up the public intellectual as a model of personalism: situated at the intersect of the individual and the collective, the intellectual exemplified how the personal might impact the public sphere. Both now argued that one needed

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<sup>25</sup> “The degeneration of everything is frightening. I don’t think I could stand another winter in New York...nothing is happening, all ties of sociability and intellectuality have snapped, people just don’t see each other” (Macdonald letter to Chiaromonte Jan 1950 Chiaromonte Papers).

to be removed from politics to seriously engage the crisis of social life (Macdonald letter to Eliot 1956).

Thus while the early 1950s saw both Macdonald and Chiaromonte “choose the West” over communism, the choice was a concomitant rejection of politics as a possible field for meaningful personalist intervention. For Macdonald, the renunciation of politics was quite literal: after publicly “choos[ing] the West” in 1952, he did not vote again until 1964 (Wreszin *Moral Temper* 359).<sup>26</sup> As Christopher Lasch later noted, “Macdonald in the very act of withdrawing from urgent political commitments was investing politics with an importance that it could no longer sustain”—an investment that had begun with the ethical turn of *politics* and was now followed by a cultural turn (Lasch 331). His 1953 reprint of “The Root is Man” included a wealth of qualifying footnotes on his original text, which indexed several changes in his thinking. While the original article had re-centered politics on morality, Macdonald now dissociated the two and elevated morality, but also acknowledged that in certain circumstances one might justify submitting to authority or engaging in force (Macdonald “The Root is Man” Reprint fn. 28). Conceding the unavoidability of accepting some forms of political realism, the reprint made allowance for occasional submission of means to ends.<sup>27</sup> Shifting toward the forms of realism he had previously strongly criticized, Macdonald’s struggled during this period to

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<sup>26</sup> “The masses today are indifferent for the same reason so many of us intellectuals are: you can’t work up much interest in a process you feel you can’t affect. Almost everybody, masses and intellectuals alike, feel ineffectual in politics (which is why half the eligible voters don’t vote even in presidential elections), but we intellectuals suffer a further frustration: can we understand politics and history any more, can we fit them into a conceptual frame, can we still believe that we can find the theoretical key that will lay bare the real forces that shape history—indeed, can we believe there *is* such a key at all?” (Macdonald “The Mills Method” *Partisan Review* Jan/Feb 1952)

<sup>27</sup> McCarthy, in a 1952 letter to Macdonald, calls him a realist. She maintains the difficulty of friendship with people who do not share her values. “The point is that I believe there are ‘palpable’ untruths and palpable evils, obvious to all, as Simone Weil says and Tolstoy says. And that the denial of the obvious made by a —to me—mistaken liberalism opens the door to the McCarthys and the Freeman group and a whole horde of scoundrels who profit by the general confusion... To sum up, what I’m trying to say is not that I’m against the practice of liberalism but rather against some of the assumptions that have crept into cover behind liberal doctrine, i.e., that ideas, people, motives are just so many integers possessing an equal value, that you’re a human being, Pegler’s a human being, I’m a human being, to precisely the same degree... I feel that times are getting dark and even rather menacing.”

differentiate his position from the prevailing reach of liberalism, which he still found to be a “hypocrisy” motivated to act not “according to principles, but according to prejudices; noble, worthy, and generous prejudices but still—prejudices” (Wreszin *Moral Temper* 272).

The distinction between his position and that of Cold War liberals lay in Macdonald’s continued commitments to personalism:

[i]t is the ‘small’ questions that now seem to me significant. What is a good life? How do we know what’s good and what’s bad? How do people really live and feel and think in their everyday lives? What are the most important human needs—taking myself, as that part of the universe I know best, or at least have been most closely associated with, as a starting point? How can they be satisfied best, here and now? Who am I? How can I live lovingly, truthfully, pleasurably? (Macdonald *Memoirs* 373).

His valorization of the small-scale and the personal experience of living well provided many of the same answers to the postwar social crisis through a different idiom. “My reactions to politics,” he wrote the editor of *Encounter* in 1958, clearly linking his previous political positions to questions of taste,

have been mainly aesthetic (including in this term the use of the higher reasoning faculties) and moral. Art and morality are oddly joined: both involve value judgments as to what is Good and what is Bad, and such judgments come down, ultimately, to one’s own taste and one’s own feelings, in rather dramatic contrast to the sphere of science, or of politics...For some reason, it is nowadays considered frivolous to base any judgment on one’s own taste and feelings; or at least to admit one is doing so. This I see as one effect of our scientized way of thinking. (Macdonald letter to the editor of *Encounter*, May 1958, qtd. in Wreszin *Moral Temper* 272)

In appealing to the overlap between aesthetics and ethics, Macdonald was able to position himself against U.S. liberalism’s high valuation on the scientific method despite his realist politics.<sup>28</sup> Much of his writing in the 1950s was motivated by the contention that, as he had

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<sup>28</sup> Macdonald considered his retreat from politics to be “taking the long view...That is, I have tried to relate current events to human experience in general, to Reason and Ethics, as against the short-term interests of political doctrines. In fact the political writing I look back on with least pride (and which, for the most part, I omitted from my book) was just that in which I subordinated the ethical-aesthetic approach to what Mr. Wollheim calls the long-term and I call the short-term approach, that is, to the demands of a political program” (cited in Wreszin *Moral Temper* 272-73).

argued from the first edition of “The Root is Man,” there existed a mode of engagement with the world not explained by objectivism, but rooted in intuitive, subjective apprehension of the world. Prevailing tendencies to overstate the importance of facts seemed to Macdonald to disavow alternative modes of thinking and experiencing the world like contemplation, reflection, imagination or speculation—which did not cast thought as means to a practical end (Macdonald *Memoirs* 426). Just because such forms of thinking could not be proved scientifically did not mean they could not be communicated or logically defended (Macdonald *Memoirs* 404). Indeed, Macdonald used aesthetic and moral judgment as his evidence of the possibility for a subjective appraisal to also resound with others more generally. Moral and aesthetic consideration and discrimination pivoted between the individual and the social and promoted the autonomy of the conscience; they were also profoundly damaged by mass thinking, rationalization, and fact consumption.<sup>29</sup>

Macdonald’s famous essay “Masscult and Midcult” elaborates this distinction between types of thinking in terms of the domains of high and low culture: for Macdonald, objects of high culture were expressions of an individual artist that resonated with the thoughts and feelings of their audiences; they investigated the particularity of the human experience and yet also pointed to standards and values that were not about conventions but about striking those “common chords that vibrate responsively in other people” (Macdonald *Against* 8, “The Root is Man”). In this sense, high culture offered a form of aesthetic experience that was personal, because it was attuned both to that which “vibrated” with others and to forms of deep subjectivity like consciousness and conscience. High culture was thus opposed to mass culture, or masscult,

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<sup>29</sup> He later titled a 1974 essay collection *Discriminations* as an ode to this point: to discriminate was to “distinguish accurately, discern differences, to observe and note differences” and to understand “life as a series of discriminations between what it is well to attempt and not” (Macdonald *Discriminations* forward).

which was defined by its mixture of “impersonality” and false intimacy: “a uniform product whose humble aim is not even entertainment, for this too implies life and hence effort, but merely distraction” (Macdonald “Masscult Midcult” 7, 5).<sup>30</sup> Unlike high cultural forms, which required some effort at comprehension and non-rational modes of engagement like speculation or imagination, commercially produced mass culture sold information consumption. Because it was sensational, mass cult seemed almost personal, because it addressed content usually considered private, but this was a false personalism, in that it did not strike the deeper chords that drew people toward community. Undoubtedly part of “the larger question of the masses,” masscult’s superficiality and uniformity instead reflected the depersonalizing destruction of such community: “the masses are in historical time what a crowd is in space: a large quantity of people unable to express their human qualities because they are related to each other neither as individuals nor as members of a community. In fact, they are not related to *each other* at all, but only to some impersonal, abstract, crystallizing factor” (Macdonald *Against* 8).

Mid-level culture, or midcult, was for Macdonald still more insidious than masscult, because its pretensions to seriousness and misappropriation of stylistic innovations made it difficult for audiences to identify: mediating between high and mass culture, it aspired to the profundity of high culture but colluded with the mass and was inherently imitative in nature (Macdonald *Against* 37). For Macdonald midcult was thus synonymous with liberalism, in that it pedaled adages with good intentions that however were too general to be meaningful and relied on the language of the commercial. In this sense midcult also disavowed the relationship between means and ends that Macdonald had conceded as impossible in the realm of the political

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<sup>30</sup> Notably, David Riesman in the *Lonely Crowd* describes the managerial ethos of mass corporate culture as encouraging a similar form of impersonalism that was simultaneously too personal, by which he too seemed to index a sense of intimacy that was impersonal because it was compulsory and false.

but still maintained in the domain of the aesthetic: worthwhile ideas could only be articulated and enacted through a style appropriate to their meaning (Macdonald letter to the editors of *Dissent* Jan 5 1960, qtd. in Wreszin *Moral Temper* 294; *Discriminations* 390).

This modernist turn to ethics as style can certainly be read as elitism. The cultural currency of taste standards at risk, Macdonald was disparaging of the pleasures and practices of the masses and lacking in awareness of the extent to which his ideas reflected access to milieus and education from which many were barred. Still, there was more at stake in his position than mere modernist snobbery: the ability for individuals to engage in meaningful personal relationships and ways of seeing the world beyond the parameters of the commercial and the conventional. Always interested in the relations promoted by groups of individuals with common values, Macdonald called for a disavowal of mass audiences in the name of a proliferation of smaller ones—even if all of those audiences were not interested in high culture objects, a multiplication of smaller audiences would enable genuine interest to guide group membership and create more discursive space for cultural objects promoting more personal kinds of thinking and relating (Macdonald letter to Harold Taylor, May 2, 1963, qtd. in Wreszin 340).

Macdonald was nonetheless aware that his position overlapped with conservatism.<sup>31</sup> Corresponding with T.S. Eliot about his reprint of “The Root is Man,” for instance, Macdonald noted the significant ways in which Eliot’s conservatism and his radical humanism intersected, particularly in terms of their mutual rejection of “progressivism, Marxist or liberal” (Macdonald letter to Eliot 1956 Macdonald Papers).<sup>32</sup> “And I think our reasons for rejecting [such

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<sup>31</sup> He expressed admiration in his article on William F. Buckley for “true” conservatism—which was distinguishable from current forms of conservatism (and liberalism), in that it was premised on standing up for moral principles.

<sup>32</sup> T.S. Eliot’s reading notes on the 1953 reprint of “The Root is Man” underscore the ambiguity inhering in Macdonald’s theories: “On page 48 again, you speak of ‘the full development of each individual’. What, when you come down to brass tacks, is ‘full development’? How do we detect the full development in the people we meet, or the degrees to which they approximate to full development? On page 49, you speak of a level of political action which most satisfies ‘the particular persons taking part in it.’ But if the persons all have different ethical views, how

progressivism] are similar—that it doesn't respect the unique quality of each individual and each work of art but crams the particular case into a general theoretical framework that does damage to it" (Macdonald letter to Eliot 1956). Eliot's reading notes for the "Root" reprint likewise noted that both Macdonald's position and his own were "about equally removed from actual politics, either of the left or the right, and where they do not agree, they are disagreements, I think, on the same plane of discourse, which is not that of current political journalism" (Macdonald letter to Eliot 1956). Yet Macdonald recognized that a principal disharmony between himself and conservatives like Eliot emerged in the origins of their ethics: whereas Eliot possessed "an objective and strong anchor for [his] ethical values, namely religious belief," Macdonald did not. Though "I agree with you," Macdonald wrote, "and not with the Marxist-liberalist-progressives, as to (1) importance of ethics and (2) the autonomy, so to speak, of ethics, which means they cannot be deduced from economic or social arrangement but are matters of individual conscience," he admitted to finding no way of avoiding anchoring his views except "on a shaky and subjective foundation, namely my own feeling about what is right and what is wrong" (Macdonald letter to Eliot 1956). To be socially valuable, the subjective needed to point toward some external referent, Macdonald believed, but he struggled to articulate and explain how feelings, judgments, and values could resonate with other people if they did not reflect abstract norms or divine law. At heart a personalist, Macdonald lamented that it was not enough to root ethics in the individual unless that rooting also connected her to something larger than herself that appealed to her sociability.

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can any political action satisfy them, and if they hold wrong ethical values, will the action be desirable, and who is to determine the values? It seems to me that like all of us, you sometimes fall into the obscurity that you justly censure in others. On the same page, 49, second column, you say: 'People should be happy and should satisfy their spontaneous needs here and now'. I think that there is a concealed valuation in the word 'need'. Obviously we all have certain needs, such as the need for nourishing food, sleep, fresh air, etc, but there are other things desired which appear to some as needs and to others not as needs at all, and I feel that what you say here is somewhat watered down in your very interesting footnote 25 on the same page" (Macdonald Papers).

Moreover, what if the ethics of one individual were misguided? “The Root is Man” refers to “a level of political action which most satisfies ‘the particular persons taking part in it,’” Eliot chided, echoing Chiaromonte’s reading notes from years earlier. “But if the persons all have different ethical views, how can any political action satisfy them, and if they hold wrong ethical values, will the action be desirable, and who is to determine the values?” (Eliot Reading Notes, Macdonald Papers). Admitting he did not totally know how to account for ethical wrong-headedness, Macdonald nonetheless maintained that groups might function as the sounding boards discouraging the progression of “wrong” values—but his cultural criticism continually charged the general U.S. population with an inability to discriminate that made such moral gatekeeping seem unlikely.

### **Personalizing the Intellectuals: Chiaromonte and the Age of Bad Faith**

There is no world any longer, only a kind of platitudinous nightmare of elementary evidences... I try to follow a trend of thought that has been haunting me for years, concerning the problem of what modern man has a right to call Fate.

— Chiaromonte, Letter to Macdonald, undated (likely mid-1950s).

The 1950s meanwhile saw Chiaromonte set up in Rome, inhabiting a new Italian Republic characterized by continuity with fascist Italy that seemed to index a profound incapacity for critical self-reflection, as fascist intellectuals migrated leftward toward the security offered by the Communist party’s increasing cultural prestige. “The experience and myth of Resistance (mostly understood as a second *Risorgimento*) had a specific impact on most [political] debates. The[se] [debates] aimed to define the role of intellectuals in mass politics, to understand the relationship between fascism, communism and Italian history, and to overcome the ‘crisis of civilization’ of the 1930s and 1940s through a critical elaboration of Marxist categories” (Bresciani “Caffi Chiaromonte”). Deeply frustrated with the rigidity of the Italian

political scene's stalemate between Catholic-influenced Christian Democrat conservatism and the rise of an oppositional Communist-coalition that mobilized the language of resistance but maintained strong ties to Moscow, Chiaromonte looked for a way outside of these limiting frameworks that would also save the intellectual from their reliance on ideology and mass politics.

This political dilemma dovetailed and was inflected by a personal one: a love affair causing Chiaromonte to question his obligation to his marital promises. Seeming to arrive too late in life to become something more permanent, the affair left Chiaromonte feeling vulnerable to forces of chance and timing that seemed beyond his control. Macdonald too was non-monogamous in the early fifties, and the friends' different approaches to resolving the crises presented by their affairs is illuminating: Macdonald was relatively frank with Chiaromonte and others about the extramarital relationships that led to his divorce, remarriage, and consequent struggle to reestablish a new status quo. Chiaromonte, on the other hand, ultimately renounced the passion represented by his affair in favor of the responsibility he felt toward his wife Miriam, and, perhaps because he had so often assumed the role of mentor and stalwart moralist, struggled to confess to Macdonald the painfulness of this state of affairs, though he did more openly confess to Miriam (Chiaromonte letter to Macdonald March 1955). By the mid-1950s, however, Chiaromonte had come to believe that Macdonald's choice was the one more angled toward moral consistency, seeing in his friend's decisions a more genuine attempt to reconcile beliefs, feelings, and actions. Chiaromonte's own path, which had originally seemed to reflect the best moral choice, began to appear a position of bad faith, in the sense that it required living out the "negation of a fact"—the fact of his being very much in love with another woman (Chiaromonte letter to Macdonald Mar 22 1955). While it is not clear that Chiaromonte maintained this attitude

for the rest of his life, he did struggle with the consequences of his choice for years afterwards. The solidarity produced by the exchange of these personal dilemmas distinctly shifted Chiaromonte's relationship with Macdonald from *maestro* toward peer—though the residue of that original relationship would always remain.<sup>33</sup>

Chiaromonte saw the personal hypocrisy he felt after renouncing his affair reflected back by the Italian political scene from which he was largely marginalized by his strong anticommunism and religious skepticism. “Ours is not an age of faith but of disbelief,” he argued, “it is an age of bad faith, that is,” of ideologies maintained by force and not conviction and characterized by politicians who “act as if they believed, but instead” do not (Chiaromonte *Il tempo della malafede*). Still first and foremost a moralist, the affair had more firmly convinced Chiaromonte that, like utopia, moral truth needed to be understood as plural and immanent in situations, demanding a live response—and not applied categorically to events. In this sense, Chiaromonte maintained that ethics should not be understood as “insensitive” to the particularity of life events, but needed to be located within the ambiguity constituting those situations (Bianco “Interview”). He thus “centered attention on the event and on the absurd and dramatic relation between man and the event: thus focusing on that chain of impalpable fragments that, infinitely fracturing, seem to dissolve History in the absurd, rather than re-order it in the name of an Idea or of a Superior Reason” (Bettizia). On one hand critical of the Enlightenment's tradition of abstract moral truths applied on principle, Chiaromonte was also highly skeptical of the role that History played in both the Sartrean existentialism on the ascent in Europe and the Marxist-influenced Italian left. History was mobilized by both as a way to justify actions as *required* by circumstance, essentially releasing people from responsibility for their decisions while framing

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<sup>33</sup> For one year during this period, when Chiaromonte was particularly depressed and tormented by his affair, the friends did not exchange a single letter.

the world as revolving around, and ultimately subject to, the autonomous Cartesian ego, who appeared in the form of the individual political actor. While the autonomy of the conscience was paramount for Chiaromonte—who like Sartre considered the human condition a state of extreme freedom that was also a great moral burden—this freedom to choose was not evidence of a kind of radical individualism but meant “literally that we do not know what we are doing” (Chiaromonte *Paradox of History*, Marchesini 350). Weeding through the plural dimensions of existence and palimpsestic layers of truths in any situation required attunement to variety of modes of experiencing the world. Moral subjectivity was thus not defined by action on the historical stage but rather by moving outside of historical contingency to the immanent relation between the particularity of a situation and its answerability to something external to it (Bianco *Chiaromonte* 108).

This rejection of history and championing of liberty of conscience has often been read as Cold War liberalism—especially once he began editing *Tempo Presente* (Present Times) with novelist and ex-Marxist Ignazio Silone in 1956.<sup>34</sup> The small magazine, a monthly review, comprised essays, news reports and book reviews and was, as Gino Bianco points out, “born to give voice to that part of the Italian culture that had not submitted to the Catholic and Communist churches” (Bianco “Interview”). It “was always considered with suspicion, marginalized” from mainstream Italian culture because its turn away from history and politics towards morality and culture seemed to oppose any serious hypothesis of social change (Ibid., Adamo). Indeed, “the position Chiaromonte occupies in a certain historical-political-cultural

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<sup>34</sup> Silone, who had been a founding member of the Italian Communist Party and symbol of committed aesthetics with novels like *Fontamara* and *Bread and Wine* in the interwar years, had broken with Marxism by the end of World War Two. He contributed, alongside Arthur Koestler, Stephen Spender and Richard Wright, in 1949 to the famous disavowal of Communism, *The God that Failed*, becoming the most prominent figure in the Italian non-communist left by the end of the 1940s.

Italian imaginary... [is as] a persuasive supporter of the West, an acrimonious enemy of communism, an indefatigable investigator of the intellectual and cultural vices of radicalism in Italy and more generally of revolutionary ethos and eschatological left tout court” (Adamo). While undoubtedly aligned with the Western liberal coalition—*Tempo Presente* was supported by the U.S. non-communist advocacy group the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF)—this image obscures Chiaromonte’s attempts to reject communist socialism without taking up capitalism and his position within a network of intellectuals and public figures on both sides of the East-West divide (Bresciani “Caffi Chiaromonte”). One of the CCF’s smaller magazines, *TP* enjoyed notable editorial latitude, publishing pieces rejected by other CCF publications (including, a piece by Macdonald, critical of the United States, that was rejected by the CCF’s most prominent magazine, *Encounter*). As editor, Chiaromonte was moreover known to contend openly with and reject positions emerging from the CCF direction.<sup>35</sup> He always maintained that he and the magazine enjoyed editorial independence—both before and after allegations later surfaced that CCF publications had been supported by funds back-channeled from the CIA (Chiaromonte letter to Macdonald Feb 1958).

The politics of Chiaromonte’s work during this period can perhaps be better accounted for in terms of his personalism, as his writing during this period attempted to establish the figure of the intellectual as a personalist mediator toggling between public discourse and private conscience, individual political preference and broader cultural currents. This recuperation of the intellectual from mass culture’s reliance on dogma meant elaborating an obligation on the part of the intellectual to the cultivation of discursive spaces alternative to state logics that might make

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<sup>35</sup> Chiaromonte’s resistance to and challenge of external direction became clear, for instance, when the CCF stated it would not maintain publication of the magazine if Silone ever left, as Silone would be less inclined to marginalize the magazine from its financial resources than Chiaromonte.

space for “good faith”: harmony between how one thought, felt, and acted. Explicitly renouncing political expediency, Chiaromonte situated the intellectual at the pivot between discourse, reality and social life.

“Everything today contributes to the growth of the Mass, academic culture no less than the movies, and there is a synthetic literature (i.e. mass processing of feelings and ideas) in the same way as there are synthetic fibers, that there are synthetic ideals, synthetic politics and synthetic ‘personal life’ as well” (Chiaromonte “Prospectus on Politics”). The intelligentsia was just as vulnerable as others to this state of affairs, because it relied so heavily on language to mediate situations (Chiaromonte “The Mass Situation”). Chiaromonte thus premised the responsibility of the intellectual in her ability to deploy language in a manner that would reveal, rather than obscure, the multiple truths of situations (Chiaromonte “The Mass Situation”). The intellectual’s charge of imagining ideal alternatives to the given would moreover inevitably require modes of thinking and expression that moved beyond polemic and dogma to speculate an outside to these historical exigencies.

With the launch of *Tempo Presente*, Chiaromonte’s work again played out as the creation of a small community, here an audience, organized around the same anxieties and values. With a circulation of about 3,000 readers, *TP* largely appealed to communist defectors, political nonconformists, and younger intellectuals, offering critiques of both Communism, Western affluence, and established theoretical positions (Chiaromonte *TP* editorial comment Apr. 1956). Receiving an enthusiastic early response, it quickly became the first magazine to familiarize Italian audiences with such figures as Hannah Arendt, Isaiah Berlin, Mary McCarthy, Raymond Aron—and, of course, Dwight Macdonald. Indeed, Chiaromonte published much of his friend’s work, convinced that Macdonald was the only contemporary U.S. writer aware of

certain cultural problems (Macdonald letter to Chiaromonte Feb 1958, Chiaromonte papers). In addition to being hospitable to the work of his *politics* cohort, *TP* also manifested several of the objectives Chiaromonte had sketched out when reimagining *politics* with Macdonald and McCarthy in 1947: it was a critique of the present that was receptive to personalized impressions and reports on current events and which encouraged conversation between the magazine, its peers, and the public (Chiaromonte letter to Macdonald Jan 13 1956).

Despite differences in character, and several conflicts over the twelve years of their editorial partnership, Silone and Chiaromonte were both committed to making the magazine a vehicle extraneous to the Catholic and Marxist cultures dominating Italian culture during the period.<sup>36</sup> Their first issue established *Tempo Presente* as “an international journal of information and conversation,” founded on the principle of critical freedom and aiming “to promote the reexamination of current modes of thinking by bringing them into confrontation with the real world” (Editorial comment *Tempo Presente* April 1956). In trying to give voice to “the part of Italian culture that wasn’t submersed in Marxist Leninism or Crocean idealism or in the Catholic church,” the publication essentially took an editorial line animated by Chiaromonte’s belief that contemporary social change would need to emerge from nonconformist interventions in civil society that were motivated by the feelings and observations of individuals, not institutions (Bianco *Chiaromonte* 129, italics my own).

This rendered the magazine particularly hospitable to expressions of dissent from Eastern European countries, and such analyses became fundamental to its outlook (Bianco “Interview”).

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<sup>36</sup> Silone was much less present as an editor than Chiaromonte, coming into the office generally only once or twice a week—and while Chiaromonte was more interested in problems with universal, rather than national, political appeal, Silone was most interested in directing the magazine to intervene in Italian socio-political life (Fofi et al. 14). Silone’s tactics in conducting the magazine at times put him at odds with Chiaromonte’s desire to move outside the political to address social questions. In general, Silone was more reticent to break entirely with establishments, such as the CCF, which could offer resources.

Indeed, the appearance of the magazine in 1956 and the direction of its commitments made it especially interested in the events surrounding the Hungarian Uprising: *TP*'s first year of publication was marked by exploration of how the intellectual might understand herself vis-à-vis this revolt, which inaugurated a moment of crisis and realignment for much of the European left.<sup>37</sup> Several early *TP* issues were dedicated to the results of a questionnaire sent to major European intellectuals—from friends like Camus and Moravia to writers like Czeslaw Milosz, Stephen Spender, Carlo Levi, and Elio Vittorini and politicians like Angelo Tasca, Enzo Enriques Agnoletti, and Ferruccio Parri—that asked these public figures whether, after seeing events in Hungary, they maintained faith in parties and institutional politics. Moreover, where did they locate the intellectual's primary obligation: with the public or in their own work? (*TP* "3 Questions for the Intellectuals"). While the questionnaire's queries were undoubtedly underwritten by a polemic against institutionalism and for public responsibility, the magazine published a range of replies by a variety of respondents, including inveterate Communists whose allegiances remained unshaken by the Hungarian revolt.

Chiaromonte's analysis of the responses to the questionnaire argued that intellectuals of the present historical moment were singularly faced with situations compelling bad faith toward either their personal beliefs or their political affiliations—often confronted with situations asking them to say one thing while thinking another and thus to subordinate their conscience to political convenience (Chiaromonte "Comments on the Survey"). For Chiaromonte, this choice represented a fundamental disavowal of the moral obligation of the intellectual and of the political reality represented by the Hungarian Uprising. Desire for the expression of alternative forms of thinking social life, Chiaromonte argued, had been at the heart of the revolution in

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<sup>37</sup> The 1956 Hungarian Uprising, which began as a student demonstration, grew into a national revolt against the country's Soviet policies that brought down the government.

Hungary: those events demonstrated that ultimately the conscience could not be ignored (Chiaromonte “Comments on the Survey”).

### **The “Prophecy” Comes True: Macdonald and the New Left**

By the early 1960s, Macdonald had become a rather sudden U.S. cultural celebrity. As a “personality” often asked to appear on television programs and participate in panel discussions, he spent much of the early 1960s touring American college campuses speaking about culture. This new appreciation for Macdonald’s work was flanked by a particularly successful review written for *The New Yorker* about Michael Harrington’s *The Other America*. Harrington’s book, a study of poverty in the United States and the cultures that grew up around it, made the compelling case that poverty still permeated the social life of the poor, and thereby directly challenged the consensus that America had become a pervasively affluent society. Macdonald’s lengthy and glowing review brought the obscure Harrington book to national attention and is credited with putting poverty on the Kennedy administration agenda—a fact of which Macdonald was proud and known to cite (Macdonald “Confrontation”).<sup>38</sup>

The validation Macdonald about the political efficacy of the Harrington review is reflective of Macdonald’s resumed interest in direct political action. Often referring to himself during this period as a conservative anarchist, he finally returned to the polls for the 1964 election, and in 1966 shifted the theme of his *Esquire* film column to politics (*Wreszin Rebel* 544, fn. 5). This renewed attention to political events was due in part to perception of a reanimation of the political arena after years of coercive consensus. But above all, it was

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<sup>38</sup> Macdonald’s acquaintance with Arthur Schlesinger Jr., a Kennedy Administration insider, provided his knowledge about the influence of the article.

motivated by the escalation of U.S. military interventions in Vietnam. While civil rights and the nation's new welfare programs were issues to which Macdonald had lent his support—signing petitions, sending money, and offering solidarity to activists in his writing—it was Vietnam that truly revived him. What absorbed Macdonald was the seeming lack of morality on the part of the U.S. political leadership: their excessive displays of force, bad (even immoral) decision-making, and false legal grounds. He quickly returned to his old *politics* arguments against the use of military force without regard for human consequences. It is a “senseless atrocity, the least excusable war in history,” Macdonald argued; a war which ominously reflected the “sheer bulk and spread of ‘the American presence’” across the globe (Macdonald ctd. in Wreszin *Rebel* 416).

Thus critical of 1960s U.S. foreign policy, Macdonald rather easily aligned himself with the new student activists demonstrating on college campuses across the country—or rather, they aligned themselves with him, taking up the anarcho-libertarianism of “The Root is Man” as a founding text for their New Left. Often called upon, like his former *politics* contributors Paul Goodman and C. Wright Mills, to inhabit the role of bridge between Old Left and New, Macdonald certainly appreciated the new mobilization of his ideas by the young and the period's new expressions of political activism. New Left political organizations were often modelled on the type of open, porous groups that Macdonald had called for in “The Root is Man,” while their members attempted to style their lives in decidedly nonconventional and anti-statist ways that spoke to his own lifestyle priorities. Macdonald often accepted New Left requests to join causes or appear at events. For many years, he moreover worked to legitimize their activities in the eyes of his Old Left peers—a marginalizing, and at times isolating, move.

Yet Macdonald's was not unqualified approval. He felt an increasingly disappointing difference in tone and content between himself and the new generation of radicals that was

premised in their extremism and anti-intellectualism. Identifying the New Left as fulfillment of a prophecy he had first pronounced in “The Root is Man”—that “any kind of really serious revolutionary or radical action...in the future of this country would be done by small groups without any idea of appealing to the masses...[and] that these groups would be anarchistic and individualistic”—Macdonald nonetheless believed that this “prophecy ha[d] come true in form,” but not, he lamented, “in content” (Macdonald “Confrontation” 575). He deemed the New Left’s political vision pragmatically superior but morally inferior to the radicalism he and the *politics* cohort had earlier worked to elaborate. This concern was premised in the belief, common among veterans of the Old Left, that the new generation of radicals did not “read very much and almost have a principled objection to thinking,” rejecting “the whole idea of any kind of serious political thinking and investigation as being extremely bourgeois” and embracing a “principled refusal to learn from the past” (575). This refusal to look backward was especially troubling for Macdonald, because it disqualified the learnings about “certain moral questions,” such as “the question of means and ends” and the moral ambiguousness of Marxism, that had been paramount for previous generations of dissenters (575). Moreover, while Macdonald accepted certain illegal tactics employed by the New Left, especially those conceived in response to unjust policies, he could not accept their violence, and returning to his 1940s *politics* position, refused to cede the point that moral ends could justify the use of force.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> “I’ve long had, and still do, mixed feelings about the New Left, especially about the SDS, or, as they disarmingly style themselves, the Students for a Democratic Society. Their political line—if one can use so definite a term, an attractive aspect of SDS being that its organization is open, democratic, indeed anarchistically porous—has often seemed to me alienated to the point of nihilism, while their methods have sometimes been both deplorable, from a libertarian point of view, and, from that of making friends and influencing people, counterproductive. The only justification for such ideology would and such tactics would be that there is a revolutionary situation in this country, which there obviously is not, in general. But on two particular, and major issues today, Vietnam and race-*cum*-poverty, there is such a situation, I think. The follies and the injustices of the Establishment, in these two cases, are so extreme and so indurated as to make necessary the use of extralegal pressures” (Macdonald *Discriminations* 451)

This perspective, which Chiaromonte largely agreed with, not only revealed anxiety about the new generation's disregard for the intellectual tradition *politics* had worked to excavate and elaborate but also reflected Macdonald's continued preoccupation about the evils inherent to industrialized mass society. Indeed, Macdonald located much of the irresponsibility of New Left radicals in their neglect of the aesthetic and moral values that he believed protected the personal against the rationalization of social life. As Norman Mailer wrote in *Armies of the Night*—an account of the 1967 anti-Vietnam March on the Pentagon, which he attended with Macdonald and crowds of young radicals—Macdonald throughout this period remained dedicated to a “sense of personal standards which demanded craft, care, devotion, lack of humbug, and simple *a priori* honesty of sentiment” (Mailer 25). These commitments, expressions of his personalism, “had given him an essential clue which was: look to the feel of the phenomenon. If it feels bad, it *is* bad” (25). Believing that the New Left failed to discriminate in this way on many registers, Macdonald distinguished his personal politics from theirs, arguing that the New Left worked to simplify problems that he and the *politics* cohort had instead worked carefully to complicate. Though he continued to stand nearer to the young activists than against them, choosing revolt over maintenance of the status quo, by the end of 1967 Macdonald had largely lost hope in the radical potential of the New Left, which seemed lacking in the moral core that he believed would distinguish them from existing players on the political field, and therefore afford real change.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> McCarthy expressed a similar feeling about choosing the students over the status quo because they seemed the lesser evil. In a letter to Chiaromonte dated June 23 1969, she wrote: “I find it hard to get my bearings, feeling myself afloat very uncertainly somewhere near the middle, if there is such a place. More accurately, my mind is behaving like a revolving door. For the first time in my life, I find I don't share a position or even a tendency with anybody. I was remembering the days of politics by contrast; they seem like an idyll... In all this I'm marginally, very marginally, on the side of the students, but its difficult to be truthful with oneself about these things. Yet if I look at it as a choice between spending the rest of my life with Mr. Nixon, Irving Howe, and the Trillings or with the students, it's not so hard to choose the students... Yet there seems to be something of caricature inherent in these movements. You see it in the language of the New Left, which sounds like a parody and doesn't mind sounding like a parody.”

For Macdonald, supporting the New Left's anarchic lifestyles was not the same as supporting their politics.

“At the present writing,” Macdonald wrote in his November 1967 *Esquire* column, “the world is going to hell. All of it, everywhere, impartially, and without regard to race, creed, or previous condition of servitude” (Macdonald *Discriminations* 435). While the young were proving “as passionately prejudiced as their elders, and less well-informed,” not to mention as “alarmingly abstract in [their] political thinking as is the ‘[R]ight,’” “[t]he decisions of those in control are as catastrophic as the reactions of those on the outside” (435). Unable to maintain his earlier optimism about the nation's renewed political energy, Macdonald lamented that whereas once “we used to worry about...when, if ever, to choose ‘the lesser evil,’ a problem involving calculations of ethics, rationality, and other old-fashioned factors,” “now there seem to be only greater evils. The choices were all invented by somebody named Hobson” (435-6).

### **The Drama of Incongruence: Macdonald, Chiaromonte, the Personalist Vision**

By 1967, Chiaromonte was in greater despair than Macdonald regarding the state of the world. In wholehearted agreement with Macdonald's reading of U.S. foreign policy as a vast exploitation of power, Chiaromonte was much less inclined than his friend to lend support or legitimacy to the new generation of radicals. Indeed, the late 1960s marked the period of least harmony between Macdonald and Chiaromonte, as the two friends often found themselves in contention, not only over the appropriate way to view the New Left, but also what its emergence meant for their personal political vision.

Macdonald and Chiaromonte saw each other with some frequency in the 1960s: Macdonald and his second wife Gloria vacationed in Italy with Chiaromonte and Miriam several

times during this period, and the Chiaromontes also returned periodically to the United States—including for an extended stay at Princeton in 1966, when Nicola, a visiting professor, delivered the Gauss Lectures. Both men agreed during these years that they “must thank the Gods that our friendship has withstood the test of time” (Chiaromonte letter to Macdonald Aug 9 1963).

Revolving as it did around shared commitments and preoccupations, the emotional and intellectual conversation constituted by their relationship continued to interrogate political events and the friends’ personal relationship to them. Chiaromonte, who had been urging Macdonald to return to political analysis for years, was happy to see Macdonald finally resume this vocation in his *Esquire* column, but was less enthusiastic when Macdonald’s political intervention took the form of participating in New Left activism. Indeed, Chiaromonte charged his friend with behaving as though he were now more interested in things like immediate action than in the kind of serious work that would manifest his moral commitments—a charge which amounted to the relatively grave accusation that Macdonald no longer upheld his earlier *politics* vision (Wreszin *Rebel* 417).

This allegation spoke to several registers of perceived out-of-jointness between Chiaromonte and Macdonald during the mid and late 1960s. By the end of the decade, Chiaromonte felt increasingly pessimistic about the possibility of political transformation through democratic institutions: existing power structures were too entrenched, the mass citizenry too passive, the ideology of the Left outdated (Chiaromonte letter to Macdonald 1970). This analysis reflected his continued frustration with the postwar Italian public sphere and intelligentsia. Despite his ongoing efforts with *Tempo Presente*, he found European intellectuals to be fundamentally compromised by ideologies impeding them from imagining alternatives to existing, stagnating political systems. Macdonald’s support for a New Left whose unfounded

optimism was largely what distinguished it from the postwar realists and existentialists who had likewise valorized immediacy at the expense of serious political thinking and moral commitment rendered him part of a “revolution” that for Chiaromonte manifested little more than the old specter of the mass movement with a new tone and rhetoric. Despite his qualms about the New Left, Macdonald’s willingness to lean in its direction and his new political currency essentially meant he was in conversation with mass and institutional politics—protesting at the White House Festival for the Arts, meeting with U.N. ambassador Adlai Stevenson, participating in the March on the Pentagon, and speaking at Columbia University’s counter-commencement—not thinking outside of these failed forms. Though Chiaromonte shared Macdonald’s abhorrence of President Johnson’s Vietnam policy, he did not believe this was just cause for actively joining forces with the New Left—because he fundamentally questioned the assumptions upon which these activists’ beliefs rested, including the possibility of democracy itself. The democratic system seemed too profoundly compromised for dissent to serve as a meaningful political act (Chiaromonte letter to Macdonald Jan 1968). What Macdonald saw as a direct relationship between feelings, actions, and ideas in the activism of the young radicals was for Chiaromonte a return to massification foreclosed the possibility of a transformative politics.

Chiaromonte’s feelings of political despair were also tied to revelations of the CIA’s clandestine financing of the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF), which had long supported *Tempo Presente*. The breaking of this story in 1967 was not as scandalous for the Italian publication as it was for other CCF magazines like *Encounter*, but since *Tempo Presente* had received about half of its funding from the CCF, the secret source of this subsidy called into question the credibility of Chiaromonte’s voice—quite a blow to a man who had long insisted on the freedom of intellectual thought. After the news broke, Chiaromonte continued to maintain

that, regardless of the CIA's clandestine backing, CCF funds for *Tempo Presente* had not come with strings attached; he avowed that he was rarely hassled about editorial decisions (Chiaromonte to Macdonald June 23 1967). Association with the CCF, he argued, had actually meant fewer political pressures on the magazine than if it had received funding from Italian sources, considering the ideological polarization of Italy's political panorama; Italian funds would almost certainly have situated the magazine in a relationship of clientelism (Chiaromonte letter to Macdonald Oct 16 1967). Indeed, Chiaromonte had long felt *Tempo Presente* was the only space amenable to his work in Italy, since it allowed him to publish what he thought without having to tailor it to a party line. He moreover told Macdonald that he believed he had been lied to when he inquired explicitly about the magazine's funding sources (Macdonald to Chiaromonte Oct 10 1967). Regardless of the degree of his knowledge about the CIA backing, Chiaromonte's correspondence with Macdonald suggests that he experienced the revelation of clandestine financing as a deep betrayal that undermined over a decade of work. The only course of action seemed to be the termination of the magazine. *TP* closed its offices a year later, leaving Chiaromonte to write criticism for Italian newspapers but increasingly isolated from any sense of likeminded community.

His feelings were hurt still further when he realized that Macdonald, who had privately expressed solidarity with Chiaromonte and recognized his friend's staunch editorial independence, signed a statement in *Partisan Review* denouncing the CIA scandal and contending that the secret funds were inherently corrupting of their recipients. Though Macdonald later agreed he should have asked for more specifics before signing the petition, having focused instead on wanting to *do* something about the affair, the rift between the two men that followed this *PR* statement symbolized the discord that would characterize the final years of

their friendship, which pivoted on precisely the tension between thought and action (Macdonald letter to Chiaromonte Oct 10 1967). The international student movements became the primary locus of this conflict. Chiaromonte, despite finding the era's student radicals generally good-willed, discriminated among their various practices and objectives: he was, for instance, highly supportive of the revolts in Eastern Europe against dictatorial oppression, which he distinguished from the university protests at Berkeley and Columbia or in France, Germany, or Italy, where dissenters seemed to exhibit a sort of categorical revolt that illustrated how "if you protest everything, you end up protesting nothing" (Bianco interview, Bianco *Chiaromonte* 147). The collective thinking these student movements manifested seemed to Chiaromonte an avenue for losing oneself in the group without having to think critically or to create community—and thus indexed the longstanding dangers of mass politics (Marchesini 357).

From this standpoint, Chiaromonte found the student radicals at heart a conformist revolt that coopted the very ideological premises and means against which it protested, another side of the same old political coin (Panizza "68" 12). This "conformism" was rooted in the sloppy thinking and historical forgetfulness that Macdonald also recognized—"the suddenly reborn conviction (on account of events, not [of] thinking...) that Marx was right, and so were Lenin, and Castro, and Mao, if not Stalin, to boot"—as well as in misbelief about the viability of the existing political forms, and above all, in the young's lack of a guiding ethics (Chiaromonte letter to Macdonald 1970). Never having witnessed a society exhibiting moral convictions worthy of respect, having grown up in a society in moral crisis, Chiaromonte argued that the new generation of radicals fundamentally lacked an ethical point of reference (Panizza "68" 14).

In this sense, Chiaromonte framed these youth movements as rebellions against societal authority that were fundamentally unconsciousness of themselves as attempts to locate a reliable

ethics (Panizza “A marriage” xxii). The problem for Chiaromonte was their expression of this rebellion as a conformist mirroring of the very means used by the authorities they rebelled against: force and expediency. Such political realism disregarded how “incalculable” the effects of political actions were, “the ‘unmeasurability’ of the ‘quantity’ called power, its subjection to contingencies and chance” (Chiaromonte to Abel Sept 19, 1963).<sup>41</sup> “The real historic task of our time, that which deserves and requires the enthusiasm of a young person, is the reconstruction of a society devastated by force and collapsing from subjection to force,” he argued (Chiaromonte qtd. in Bianco interview). The postwar’s “abominable modern cult of historical action and accomplished facts” played out in these student movements as a veneration of action that privileged disruption and *doing* above the non-material dimensions of life (Marchesini 350-52, Bianco *Chiaromonte* 108). As with Marxism and existentialism, Chiaromonte saw in the student movements an essential disavowal of the conscience and lack of imagination that reduced politics to expressions of the autonomous acting ego (Bianco *Chiaromonte* 110).<sup>42</sup>

Thus framing the young radicals as mass movements whose revering of action exposed new forms of ideological conformity and egotism, Chiaromonte experienced Macdonald’s alliance with New Left activism as a political betrayal reflected in the personal betrayal of signing the *PR* statement. His idealism felt an increasingly solitary position. Marginalized professionally without *Tempo Presente* as a vehicle for his thought, after years of congruence he moreover felt at cross-purposes with Macdonald, who could not, despite his own wariness of the

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<sup>41</sup> “The point is the ‘unmeasurability’ of the ‘quantity’ called power, its subjection to contingencies and chance, is dependen[t] on facts that are neither measurable nor merely ‘political,’ but moral, intellectual, social, psychological, and—why not?—aesthetic as well” (Chiaromonte to Abel Sept 19, 1963).

<sup>42</sup> “Sartre’s maxim ‘Man is responsible for the whole of humanity’ strikes me as being the formula *par excellence* of modern sophistry and false morality. It is evident that if we cease to regard a thought as such and look on it instead as a potential act, every single thought can be transformed into a ‘crime against humanity’” (Chiaromonte *Worm of Consciousness* 193).

New Left, entirely understand the strength of his friend's sharp depreciation of the young radicals (Bettizia).

### **A Secular Sacred: The Ethics of Friendship**

I for my part am firmly convinced that man should be capable of humility in front of reality, since in every particle of reality is hidden something which we might call the 'numinous', the 'sacred,' or the 'divine', as we prefer: an element that escapes not only rationality, but even definition and naming.

— Chiaromonte, Letter to Abel, 1963.

Macdonald's and Chiaromonte's differing readings of the New Left was trying for a relationship that had always been characterized by "a deep congruence on substantive questions" (Macdonald letter to Chiaromonte July 1967). Theirs was not a particularly contentious or bitter dispute, but they attached great importance to each other's judgments and the ongoing tension between them resonated as a distressing, unprecedented disharmony (Chiaromonte letter to Macdonald Oct 16 1967). The pain inherent to this disagreement emphasizes the extent to which consensus and accord had served as the basis for both their friendship and their personalism: if the latter had always been rooted in the harmony produced by shared moral principles, the former too had been founded on fundamental agreement—a valorizing of congruence perhaps unsurprising for figures upholding what were often lonely intellectual and political positions.

"[C]ould we spend a summer on Cape Cod together, I hope I could at least explain to you what I mean," Chiaromonte wrote Macdonald in 1970. "Something not very different (although more radically thought out, I think) from what we used to agree upon. The Vietnam war, and the fact that some kind of effective action on this issue seems to have some effect, does not, it seems to me, fundamentally change the terms of the problem. These are even less changed, I believe, by the ideology of the New Left" (Chiaromonte letter to Macdonald 1970). For Chiaromonte, the "terms of the problem" ever remained the question of how to confront the moral crisis of postwar

life so as to enable true sociability. Finding his personalist approach and commitments relatively unshaken since the Second World War, Chiaromonte expressed nostalgia for a “summer on the Cape,” where lively discussions of ideas and events might once again yield harmony in outlook. Macdonald too believed that his 1960s politics reflected values he had elaborated in *politics* with Chiaromonte, who now seemed to exhibit a troublingly pessimistic loss of faith. For both friends, the *politics* summers continued to resonate as a special period in both their thinking and their friendship.

Yet the disagreement that was “so painful to us both” indexed what in fact were longstanding differences in emphasis between Macdonald’s and Chiaromonte’s thought (Macdonald letter to Miriam Chiaromonte 1970). Macdonald had long been more open than Chiaromonte to the necessity of some realism in order to effect political change; though his critiques of the New Left overlapped with several of Chiaromonte’s, they did not go as deep, because he had grown closer in political orientation to the new generation than his friend. Macdonald saw in Chiaromonte’s rejection of the student movements a political snobbery that indexed Macdonald’s own anxieties about espousing certain forms of elitism: “I’m for elitism in culture but not in politics,” he wrote to McCarthy in 1969. Chiaromonte’s “vagueness about What Is To Be Done now” and “flashes of a disturbing, to me, kind of anti-popular elitism,” suggested that, while “I do believe in people – Rousseau was more right than Hobbes...I think Nick maybe doesn’t anymore” (Macdonald letter to McCarthy Sept 12 1969).

Chiaromonte admitted to his undemocratic outlook—real democracy seemed impossible to him in point of fact, as it was too dependent on mass politics. His opposition to the young radicals moreover reflected another fundamental concern Macdonald did not share about the New Left’s embrace of uninhibited lifestyles: Chiaromonte saw in the New Left a desire to

politicize Freud that he had also located in Macdonald's writing about pleasure in "The Root is Man" years before (Panizza "68" 16). His deep skepticism about the moral value of freeing the ego—which seemed to shore up a kind of Cartesian sovereignty at odds with the emphasis on his personalism—marked a fundamental division between himself and his friend. Whereas Chiaromonte located his personalist ethics in the hidden, non-material order of things and the human's vulnerability to external truths, Macdonald's personalism was instead rooted in the human and what felt right to her. He championed a form of heroic moral consciousness based in subjective experience and reflective speculation about the consequences of actions that linked feeling good with living right and well. Discrimination and intuition enabled one to distinguish values and the proper course of action given the particularities of a given situation. Small communities and meaningful interpersonal relationships were important to this vision: their size ensured attention to the personal aspects of life, while also providing the solidarity and support necessary to sustain one's moral code and live by it.

Chiaromonte also valued attunement to feelings and reflection on the consequences of action, but they were part of a process of identifying the justice immanent within situations and of navigating the unpredictable, irrational, and arbitrary forces governing human existence: action was always subject "to the truly unwritten laws that rule the world" and implied consequences that could not be accounted for in advance (Chiaromonte to Abel Sept 19, 1963). Emphasizing the lesson that through Simone Weil he had taught *politics*—"the sense of limits, of being part of [some]thing that one does not know"—Chiaromonte emphasized that reality was not solely empirical, but characterized by a polyvalence of contradictions (Marchesini 351). His personalist interest in groups, friendship, and the small-scale was inflected with a fatalism and deep skepticism of action that was in many ways biographical: tied to his upbringing, experience

of war and reconstruction, and even romantic life.<sup>43</sup> He remained hostile “to any kind of realism, aesthetic as well as political,” as it seemed hubristically blind to the metaphysical dimensions of experience and fundamentally lacking in imagination of alternatives to the status quo (Chiaromonte letter to Macdonald Aug 1963). Chiaromonte’s ethics thus essentially resembled the natural religion of the Greeks: it was not preconceived but required confronting reality as it happened and one’s limited power within it (Panizza “‘68” xx, Panizza “A marriage of true minds” xxiii).

There is an extent to which the different inflections of these personalisms refracted the friends’ respective cultural contexts. Though adamantly non-religious, Chiaromonte was more comfortable with versions of mysticism and sacrifice informed by Catholic thought. He recognized that his “tirade against ‘realism’ [wa]s actually directed at my Italian colleagues, their cheap Machiavellianism even in matters where Machiavelli has no business at all. It is the curse of Italy” (Chiaromonte letter to Macdonald Aug 1963). Macdonald, meanwhile, upheld a version of anarchic individualism which, while also traceable to the type of Italian rural context into which Chiaromonte was born, seemed informed by an almost cowboy mythology of personal honor and non-conformist rebellion and he remained at heart more optimistic than Chiaromonte.

Despite these differences in emphasis, both men continued to frame the postwar’s moral crisis as a threat to the personal that was only “collectively surmountable” (Marchesini 348). Their refusal to subsume subjective experience to rationalistic or dogmatic modes of thinking and championing of the live, flexible, particular, and non-empirical became a means for toggling

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<sup>43</sup> In the 1960s, he turned to myth as a means of locating “something equivalent to a religious standpoint” that might motivate and animate social life (Chiaromonte letter to Macdonald Jan 1968). “[A] mixture of myth and reason is the only truth man can attain” (Ibid.). In the 1960s, the idea of myth became increasingly important to the work of several Italian thinkers and writers, including Pier Pietro Pasolini—an unsurprising overlap considering the several points of intersect between their thought. Pasolini’s reading of the New Left, for instance, dovetails in important ways with Chiaromonte’s. The relation between the two men’s perspectives is worth further exploration

between the liberty of conscience and the solidarity of communal life—an attempt to salvage the individual from the mass that nonetheless located meaningful living in the sociality offered by other forms of collectivity. The weight accorded to similarity within this personalist vision maintained like-mindedness as a form of voluntary association that was at least partially animated by their desire, as men conscious often alienated from the social worlds they inhabited, to feel in-tune with others.

If the idealistic personalism motivating *politics* disappointed Macdonald and Chiaromonte when it was put into practice by the Europe-America Groups and the New Left—essentially proving Chiaromonte’s early argument that utopia should ultimately remain a heuristic—this is not to say that their personalist politics were a failure. Indeed, their vision was perhaps best expressed by the friendship it had both constituted and been constituted by. Inherently personal, their “lovingly dependable” bond offered a space of continued devotion and support, a bridge between individual and collective life that kept their commitments alive over time and helped them to negotiate both personal events and public ones (Macdonald letter to Miriam Chiaromonte 1972). Chiaromonte’s untimely death was thus an utterly “*depriving*” loss for Macdonald in 1972 (Macdonald letter to Miriam Chiaromonte 1972). For Chiaromonte had been

[t]he one person, except my poor dear father, that gave me the feeling of being valued for myself, individually, not for my brains (though also for them too) or achievements, just for myself—a personal love and respect—as I felt for him too... [a friend] who...shared my intellectual interests and was also a brother in that we could talk about things on the same level. (Macdonald letter to Miriam Chiaromonte 1972)

Chiaromonte, Macdonald wrote, was “the one person—despite recent political-cultural disagreements, w. were so painful to us both—I felt closest to morally and intellectually, also personally” (Macdonald letter to Miriam Chiaromonte 1972). As Chiaromonte had noted in his

final letter to Macdonald, “differences of opinion” ultimately were less important than the “personal feelings” that had grown between the two friends: over the years, their relationship had produced a love that exceeded mere like-mindedness and was able to withstand discord and difference (Macdonald letter to Miriam Chiaromonte 1972). Within the unit of their friendship, their personalism produced the kind of meaningful relationality they had long believed the antidote to a broken world. That Macdonald’s condolence letter to Miriam Chiaromonte ended with a “passage from *The Great Gatsby*,” to express “what Nick was like to his friends” is not coincidental (Macdonald letter to Miriam Chiaromonte 1972). Like Jay Gatsby, Nicola was an idealist entirely out of place, and like Nick Carraway, Dwight found him “worth the whole damn bunch put together” (Fitzgerald 154).

## Chapter Two.

### Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King Jr., and the Personal Politics of Spiritual Community

As Chapter One illustrated, the early postwar period was one characterized by a deep commitment to political realism. 1948, for instance, was the year in which Hans Morgenthau published his landmark *Politics Among Nations*, delineating a realist theory of international relations premised in analysis of competing interests that gave political behavior “a kind of rational outline, a map that suggests to us the possible meanings of foreign policy” (Morgenthau 5). This approach to describing and predicting political action across the political spectrum framed politics as relations of power reducible to choices between rational alternatives and competing interests. Within this paradigm, state action functioned beyond the purview of moral principles: it’s obligation was to maintain national survival within a system of power politics. The rise of political realism thus also marked a resurgence of *realpolitik* that explicitly rejected expressions of social progressivism as idealism.

Mobilized by U.S. Cold War cultural politics, the theory of political realism became a blueprint for efficaciously protecting a vision of democracy that was nonetheless framed as a moral end. Indeed, during the early postwar period establishment religion fused with nationalism to mark Christian belief as an index of loyal citizenship and a bulwark of democracy with an implicit anticommunist consequence (McCarragher 91). President Eisenhower literalized this link between the American democracy and religion in 1953, when he held a signing ceremony to publicly affirm that the U.S. government was built on biblical principles (Kruse xiii). As his administration mobilized religion’s “power to unite Americans around a common understanding of their past and to dedicate them to a common plan for their future,” U.S. legal scholars and civil liberties organizations likewise tended to maintain that “the First Amendment mandated the

separation of church and state but not the separation of religion and politics” (Kruse 68, xvi).

Avowing its foundations as a “city on a hill”, U.S. public discourse assiduously merged political and religious identities to emphasize America’s special relationship with the divine—stressing, at times inconsistently, both the separation of church and state as evidence of the American democratic exceptionalism and Eisenhower’s claim that “without God there could be no American form of Government, no American way of life” (Eisenhower, “Back to God”). With the introduction of “one nation under God” into the pledge of allegiance in 1954 and the emergence of “In God We Trust” as the national motto, by mid-decade religion was firmly rooted in the U.S. public sphere.

This increase in religious rhetoric mirrored an unprecedented upsurge in U.S. religious observation and affiliation. The 1950s saw “a huge wave of spending on suburban churches,” while “[r]eligious membership surged to the highest levels in U.S. history” (Hulsether 151). Just under 50 percent in 1940, after the Second World War “the percentage of Americans who belonged to a church or synagogue suddenly soared, reaching 57 percent in 1950 and then peaking at 69 percent at the end of the decade, an all-time high” (Kruse xv). While “membership in churches grew at more than twice the rate of the nation’s population growth during this period,” the circulation of scripture also skyrocketed as the Bible overwhelmingly became identified as “‘the revealed word of God’ rather than simply a ‘great piece of literature’” (Herberg *Protestant, Catholic, Jew* 14, qtd. in Fisher “American Religion”).

*Life* magazine’s final issue of 1955, a special number on “Christianity in America,” highlights just how explicitly the political grammar of the mid-1950s framed the nation’s religious revival in terms of a special relationship with the divine: *Life*’s middlebrow readers were reminded that religion was advancing like “a mighty wave over the U.S.,” “commanding the

attention and energies of men as it had not since the days of the country's first devout settlers” (*Life* December 1955 46). The issue’s featured editorial, “The American Moral Consensus,” outlining how the scaffolding of the U.S. government revealed commitment “to the Aristotelian belief that politics is a branch of morals,” asserted that the U.S. Constitution “hides or represents something greater than itself which connects our politics with eternal truth” (57). Without the religious faith of its citizens to provide the moral consensus necessary for a functioning state, “America would be little more than a geographical expression” (57). It was agreement about faith in God that united the nation and constituted the power of the inherently moral core of the American way of life. The Cold War cultural politics of the nuclear family and ethics of domesticity pivoted around this belief.<sup>1</sup>

As Kevin M. Kruse points out, however, studies from the period revealed this religious “revival to be a bit light on substance—a Gallup Poll in 1950, for instance, found that while 80 percent of Americans believed the Bible was ‘the revealed word of God,’ only 47 percent could name even a single author of the gospels...The American people, like Eisenhower, had become very fervent believers in a very vague religion” (Kruse 68). Indeed, breeding such popular texts as *The Power of Positive Thinking*, which was written by the minister Norman Vincent Peale, the period saw a “managerial revolution in liberal Protestantism, [which] together with the suburban diaspora of Catholicism,” situated the nation’s establishment religion firmly within the hegemonic ethos of midcentury institutional culture (McCarragher 105-6). While Protestantism had long been the U.S.’ dominant and more economically secure religious affiliation, with Catholicism clearly marked as “a working-class denomination composed of a multitude of ethnic groups,” in the postwar years this demographic configuration “changed dramatically as

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<sup>1</sup> On the moral underpinnings of the Cold War, see, for instance, Oakes, *The Imaginary War*.

thousands of Catholics increased their incomes, moved to the suburbs, and joined new parishes devoid of clear ethnic association” (O’Brien 112). This social transformation “hit Catholics particularly hard because they had been overwhelmingly located in urban ethnic enclaves prior to the war,” and the suburban exodus confused and complicated the forms of ethnic-based belonging that Catholic identity had previously offered (Fisher 232). The suburbs moreover neutralized the cultural differences and divergences in belief among Protestants, Catholics, and Jews, as those distinctions “carried less weight for determining the make-up of workplaces and neighborhoods, patterns of friendship and marriage, and forms of identity” (Hulsether 152).

As Catholics joined the expanding white-collar middle class and its managerial culture, figures like the Protestant theologian Reinhold Niebuhr became important representatives of the intersect of U.S. establishment religion with “the corporate commonwealth” conflating “faith, freedom, and free enterprise” (McCarragher 91, 94, Kruse xiv). As *Time*’s surprisingly academic cover story on Niebuhr in 1948 indicates, Niebuhr advocated a Christian realism of pragmatic realpolitik premised in belief that the root of societal evils was the inherent sinfulness of humankind itself: our constitutive state of original sin. He advocated “the principle of choosing lesser evils...to uphold democracy and US postwar economic plans against totalitarians,” arguing that ““the sin of imperialism... may well be a less dangerous form of selfishness than an irresponsible attitude toward the task of organizing the human community”” (qtd. in Hulthser 104). At the same time, the early postwar era also saw an evangelical revival notably marked by the launch of the career of Billy Graham, who, subscribing to a pro-capitalist religious libertarian discourse in which “Scripture itself” suggested “that faith and business, properly blended, can be a happy, wholesome, and even profitable mixture,” by 1952 had already established himself as a

proponent of evangelical revival and was spiritually advising President Eisenhower (Kruse ix, qtd. in Kruse 37).

As Kruse has argued, because this increase in religious affiliation and identification occurred in tandem with consolidation of the U.S.'s self-image as a fundamentally religious nation, the 1950s' nexus of religion, realism, and foreign policy is generally reduced to the cultural politics of the Cold War. Kruse complicates this account by tracing how religion's "unprecedented role in the public sphere" during the Eisenhower administration actually "echoed and amplified the work of countless private organizations and ordinary citizens who had already been active in the same cause" since the New Deal, in a concerted battle against the threat posed to big business by an expansionist state (Kruse xiv). Like Kruse, I too want to problematize the reduction of this 1950s upsurge in religious interest to the Cold War politics of communist containment by arguing that the migration of religious language and imagery into the U.S. postwar public sphere was also coextensive with the era's discourse of a world in crisis. Though not isolatable from the explicitly nationalistic and pro-capitalistic policy agendas that played out on Madison Avenue and in Hollywood and Washington, D.C., the turn to religion nonetheless also signaled desire for the forms of emotional security and psychological rootedness offered by faith, and, as Arthur Schlesinger Jr. observed, reflected

evidence on every hand of widespread internal anxiety and discontent. Billy Graham and Senator McCarthy have both been beneficiaries of this tormenting uncertainty; the so-called religious revival is a significant manifestation of inner unrest; and, indeed, the role of President Eisenhower as a national father image only emphasizes the extent to which many Americans have become today passionate seekers after some form of spiritual reassurance. It thus seems hard to deny that widespread discontent of some kind exists. (Schlesinger, "The Future of Liberalism")

Indeed, as Schlesinger identified, the period's heightened religious mood also indexed a search for forms of meaningful living and fellowship bound up with the postwar crisis of experience,

locating belonging and signification in religious congregations and convictions. The period's religious sensibility thus also bore the weight of collective desires to assuage feelings of alienation and existential uncertainty and to probe the contours of moral obligation in a changing postwar political, social, and geographical landscape.

In this chapter, I move from Macdonald's and Chiaromonte's cross-Atlantic intellectual cosmopolitanism to the register of U.S. religious discourse to address two postwar personalists who framed religion as the site for social repair: Dorothy Day and Martin Luther King Jr. looked to the divine as the remedy for "the long loneliness"—or "spiritual hunger"—they saw at the heart of the postwar crisis of experience (Day, *Long Loneliness*; Coles 62). Both self-identified religious personalists, Day and King were important actors in a discursive network of U.S. postwar religious thinkers who framed the postwar era's existential crisis as evidence of a spiritual homelessness. Seeing politics as first a question of faith, Day and King turned to religious practice to address the desubjectification at the heart of the era's racism, violence, and poverty: religious practice offered a repertoire for political protest and a methodology for reconstructing political personhood. Underwriting two key moments of 1950s dissent, the civil defense protests and the Montgomery bus boycott, their personalism highlighted the potential for redemptive suffering to constitute a form of voluntary collectivism bound by the divine (Farrell 36). Indeed, rather than taking up the common narratives framing these rarely paired events as manifestations of the irrationality of anticommunist hysteria or the inevitable victory of civil rights liberalism, I read the civil defense protests and the Montgomery boycott as articulations of a similar politics of personalism that championed personal responsibility and self-discipline as expressions of the moral obligation of living out "a harsh and dreadful" love toward others (Day *LL* 363). By isolating Day's and King's work in the mid-1950s, short moments in their much

longer and also rarely paired careers, I hope to illuminate how their interventions in a postwar context of religious revivalism reformulated the relationship between personhood, politics, and religion posit a transformative sacrificial love as the foundation of both subjectivity and the spiritual community capable of repairing a society fractured by its distance from the divine.

### **Realism, Idealism, and the Personalist Intervention**

Dorothy Day and Martin Luther King, Jr. were highly skeptical of the postwar era's "boom in belief" and the contradictions they saw inhering within this new religious energy, increased church-going, and spate of church building. Insisting that living out religious conviction involved "a costly discipleship in the midst of hardship that is the polar opposite of cheap grace or armchair 'consumer' faith," they maintained it was not only proclamation of belief but also how one lived out one's faith that mattered (Hinze 36). This was an outlier position in a postwar culture of religious realism and national moral consensus. Key 1950s social dissenters, Day and King worked to sidestep Old Left atheism, Cold War capitalism, and the period's "moral" consensus by framing the material conditions of this world as intimately bound to thought about the next. In this sense, they aligned with the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Social Gospel tradition of U.S. religious activism, which had linked salvation to good works—but was explicitly rejected by Niebuhr and the Christian realists of the postwar era.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, while the reformed-minded Social Gospel had dominated U.S. religious thinking among liberal clergy in the first half of the twentieth century, marrying Christian ethics to a progressive and redistributive social justice, by the early postwar, such attempts to perfect the world had largely given way to forms of religious realism "suspicious of activists...[who were] too socialist or

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<sup>2</sup> Notably, Niebuhr had begun his career as a member of FOR, eventually breaking ties with their approach with the publication of his 1932 *Moral Man and Immoral Society*.

pacifist” (Hulsether 185). Realists viewed the injustices of this world as the inevitable consequence of man’s original sinfulness; emphasis on improving the material conditions of this life betrayed an imprudent optimism about the perfectibility of the material world and blindness to public life’s inexorable state of moral failure. “Whereas the social gospel had stressed progress toward a more just society, realists stressed defending the US status quo against an external evil,” usually in the guise of fascism or totalitarianism, calling for a fight against *both* “foreign enemies and the naive idealists who closed their eyes to their threat” (Ibid. 104). Finding in idealism, as Niebuhr argued, “an irresponsible attitude toward the task of organizing the human community’,” realists marked progressive social campaigns as dangerous and misguided expressions of the sin of human arrogance—if not as evidence of extreme communist influence (Niebuhr qtd. in Hulthser 104).

Day and King were hardly Social Gospel idealists. While proximate to the larger conversations about the perceived warping of the person by social structures like the state and bureaucratic institutions that characterized a range of progressive discourses, they were too skeptical of optimism and ideas of human perfectibility and too committed to a framework of redemptive suffering that posited pain as spiritually beneficial to fall into the idealist camp.<sup>3</sup> Yet their efforts to hold the political arena accountable to the same moral questions as the private

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<sup>3</sup> In this sense, they advanced a perspective in many ways closer to Tillich or Simone Weil than the Frankfurt School. Indeed, similarities between Day and Weil abound, including their early socialist political activism, disillusionment, and later turn toward religion. An important difference, however, is that Day was a practicing Catholic. Despite often challenging (though in a very interesting and outwardly pious way) Church authority and the clerical hierarchy, Day generally supported Catholic doctrine and theology. The Church, moreover, offered her models for community. Weil, alternatively, was highly skeptical of the Church’s history of exclusion, its “capacity to excommunicate, deny, separate and deem people, religions and other traditions as unholy was the main reason as to why the Church was not representative of an incarnated Christianity.” Few detailed comparisons of Day and Weil exist. For an overview of their thought, see “Dorothy Day and Simone Weil: God, War and Poverty,” Be Scofield, *Common Sense Religion* June 20, 2010 ([www.commonensereligion.com/2010/06/dorothy-day-and-simone-weil-god-war-and-poverty.html](http://www.commonensereligion.com/2010/06/dorothy-day-and-simone-weil-god-war-and-poverty.html)).

sphere meant that neither were they realists.<sup>4</sup> The limit of human perfectibility itself called for introduction of the divine into the domain of the social. “Any religion that professes to be concerned with the souls of men and is not concerned with the slums that damn them, the economic conditions that strangle them, and the social conditions that cripple them is a dry-as-dust religion,” King wrote in *Stride Toward Freedom*, his 1957 account of the Montgomery bus boycott. True religion, he and Day argued, ought “to change the souls of men, and thereby unite them with God” by also changing “the environmental conditions of men so that the soul will have a chance after it is changed” (King *Stride* 23).

Framing public failure to produce justice and human fellowship as a threat to the sacred represented a lonely position during the 1950s. Indeed, essentially inhabiting a third-camp stance in the realism/idealism divide, Day and King advanced a religious politics premised in the image of a personal God harder to peg to the political spectrum than to identify as a form of postwar personalism. Renouncing “attacks on the personal spirit from all sides—collectivist communism, tyrannical fascism, exploitative capitalism, and hedonistic liberalism,” Day maintained that the social crisis of modernity required first and foremost a transformation of the heart. Like King, she believed in a personal God, meaning a divine being who was not distant or abstract and whose characteristics served as the essential model for human personality. “I *Do* believe in a personal God,” she wrote in 1950. “I have had too many prayers answered in a direct personal way.... I’m going to pray to the Little Flower [St. Therese of Liseux] to send you a rose some time just to confound you, so that you will begin to think there is something in this personal

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<sup>4</sup> The influence of Niebuhr on King has been widely noted. King himself told the Dialectical Society in 1954: “Niebuhr’s anthropology is the necessary corrective of a kind of liberalism that too easily capitulated to modern culture...Man who has come so far in wisdom and decency may be expected to go much further as his methods of attaining and applying knowledge are improved Although such ethical religion is humane and its vision is a lofty one, it has obvious shortcomings. This particular sort of optimism has been discredited by the brutal logic of facts.” (King qtd. in Chappell 15)

business. They [the holy] are as personal as you and I” (Day, letter to Ammon Hennacy, July 19 1950, qtd. in *All the Way to Heaven*, p 184).

The person was distinguished from the individual through its link to the divine, meaning Day and King identified the person, created in God’s image, as the fundamental moral unit. Believers were ethically challenged to manifest their divinely constituted personhood politically, by loving through suffering: the personal responsibility of living out one’s faith pivoted on a concept of sacrificial love akin to the one espoused by theologian Paul Tillich—a love whose goal was to unify by returning the human to God and which was distinct from sentimentality or Eros. Sacrificial love had the power to transform relationships both with others and the divine by reconstituting subjects into members of a spiritual community. States of dispossession like poverty and racial discrimination thus became spiritual resources for heightened access to the divine: the practice of personifying religious beliefs through loving performances of suffering, self-discipline, and sacrifice counteracted the way social institutions and ideologies depersonalized those they encountered, treating them as abstract objects.

For Day, sacrificial love was the basis of a personal politics of voluntary poverty that embraced the culture of the poor through acts of physical and affective labor that literally embodied the lifestyle of the economically and socially downtrodden. Opposing the concept of the autonomous self with one premised in suffering and self-abnegation, she maintained the death of “[t]he age of individualism, laissez faire industrialism and self-seeking capitalism” and “[e]mbers of the charred structure built up by the Protestant Revolution”: “Men are beginning to realize that they are not individuals but persons in society, that man alone is weak and adrift, that he must seek strength in common action” (Day “Liturgy and Society”). Repudiation of self-sovereignty through sacrifice facilitated an “intimacy with Christ” that enabled an “openness

toward the other, towards the non-self” that reorganized the subject through its opening up to communion with others and the divine (Fisher 64, 80, 63; Faltermeier 238). The spiritual community this facilitated for Day was the Mystical Body of Christ, “suprapersonal unity” in Christ that underwrote the Catholic liturgy and offered the means to unify those torn “apart by Individualism into snobbery, apathy, prejudice, blind unreason” by reconstituting them as “members of one body” (Day “Liturgy and Society”). This form of divine community would produce both “spiritual wholeness and social unity” rooted in the mysterious communal experience of spiritual life (Fisher xiv, 44; O’Brien 20, Day “Liturgy and Sociology”).

King’s personalism instead presented a politics of racial protest that leveraged religious subjectivity and the self-worth promoted by religious faith to constitute political personhood, responding to the depersonalization of racial injustice with Christian love (Selby 42). Based in “the realization that unearned suffering is redemptive” and productive of agency, this protest “was almost inevitably personalist, because the strictures of Southern segregation structured life so much that everyday activities like riding a bus or sitting at a lunch counter would be interpreted as political” (Farrell 81). Linking such small but symbolic acts with both the world historical and the divine, King worked to create a mass movement that was also personally rooted in the commonplace. The goal of this movement was not only transformation of the material conditions of race but the creation of the Beloved Community—an anticipatory but achievable state of fellowship characterized by proximity to the divine and the “unlikely transformations” it would yield (Luker 44). King believed “his call was to bind the beloved community to America and the world” (Simpson 60). Racial protest would enable the “qualitative change in our souls as well as a quantitative change in our lives” to make this vision possible: “As we move in this transition from the old age into the new we will have to

rise up in protest. We will have to boycott at times, but let us always remember that boycotts are not ends within themselves. A boycott is just a means to an end...The end is the creation of a beloved community.” (Luker 51, qtd. in. Luker 43).

Thus while the first chapter of this dissertation outlined the social units of friendship and small groups as personalist spaces mediating between individualism and massification to address the perceived failure of the political by, Day and King instead advanced an eschatological personalism understood as both the catalyst for transformation of the historical present and as the foundation for the Kingdom to Come. Triangulating relation between the self and others with the divine in a manner that stretched responsibility toward all three, Day and King are often situated in relation to the longer traditions of Catholic Social Teaching and Protestant black radical thought into which they intervened and which they influenced—but they must also be positioned in relation to the philosophies of religious personalism from which their work borrowed to articulate an ethics that eschewed the realist/idealist divide.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, both King and Day repurposed aspects of more established bodies of personalist thought as means for framing their politics, which transplanted religiously located imperatives into the public sphere by mobilizing appeals about spiritual subjectivity that personalists espoused.

Day was most influenced by French personalism, a nineteenth-century school of thought, not inherently religious in nature, that was developed in response to prevailing strands of individualism, rationalism, collectivism, and Hegelian idealism to promote “the centrality of the person as the primary locus of [human] investigation” (“Personalism” Stanford Encyclopedia of

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<sup>5</sup> For King, this genealogy would include such figures as W.E.B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, C.L.R. James, and Harry Haywood. For Day, it would include papal encyclicals *Rerum Novarum* “Of New Things” (1891) and *Quadragesimo Anno* “On the Fortieth Year” (1931), the writings of saints like Saint Therese of Lisieux, and contemporaries like Thomas Merton and Jacques Maritain.

Philosophy). Through her mentor and CW co-founder Peter Maurin, Day became acquainted with the French Catholic personalism advanced by figures like Jacques Maritain and Emmanuel Mounier, for whom the “aim of the Christian in the world” was to realize the full potential of the whole human person through the divine, thereby “enabling all people to live fulfilling lives on earth” (Kelly 38).<sup>6</sup> When Day first encountered it in the 1930s, the French personalist school, emphasizing personal responsibility in relation to the poor, offered an antibourgeois alternative to both the “rights of man” discourse of public human rights and Marxist collectivism, arguing that the human person “can never be considered merely as part of a whole, whether of family, class, state, nation, or even humanity” (Weizer 10). Instead, French personalism exalted the person as distinguishable from the individual through its link to the divine and espoused a decidedly communitarian approach to collectivity always rooted in the person as the fundamental moral unit (Fisher 44).

Despite their earlier skepticism of communism, “the French personalists turned sharply toward the Marxian left after the [Second World War]”; their American Catholic associates, however, remained outsiders to “any discernible [political] tradition” (Fisher “American Religion” 52). Indeed, Day was never strict in her adherence to French personalism—she never, for instance, took up its more triumphalist aspects—but she did align with much of its anti-modernism and, especially, with its attention to the poor and hesitance towards general forms of collectivity like the human family. She essentially saw her politics, which leaned toward

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<sup>6</sup> Maurin for instance channeled Mounier in “easy essays” like the following, called “The Personalist”: “A personalist/is a go-giver,/not a go-getter./He tries to give/what he has,/and does not/try to get/what the other fellow has./He tries to be good/by doing good/to the other fellow./He is altro-centered/not self-centered./He has a social doctrine/of the common good./He spreads the social doctrine/of the common good/through words and deeds./He speaks through deeds/as well as words/for he knows that deeds/speak louder than words./Through words and deeds/he brings into existence/a community,/the common unity/of a community.” (Mark and Louise Zwick, “Roots of the CW Movement: Influences on Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin” p. 64-5 in *Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement*)

anarchism, as a means of giving form to the middle ground between the reactionary and the revolutionary through commitment to small-scale action that upheld the importance of the spiritual to political fulfillment (Day letter to Francisco Fernandez, April 24, 1955, qtd. in *All the Way to Heaven*). For this reason, Day's personal politics could varyingly resemble the anti-welfare-statism of rightwing libertarianism, the class criticisms of Marxism, and antimodern conservatism, and it betrayed the dogged resolve of both the orthodox and the heretic. Skeptical of communism and anti-communism alike, she was also highly critical of religion practiced as a form of middle-class belonging or abstract nationalism and took up the plight of the industrial worker while also advocating agrarianism. In this sense, French personalism did not define Day's thought so much as provide a constellation of associations, referents, and commitments for a philosophy distinctly personal to Day herself, in that it had been arrived at through a long biographical process of political organizing and reconciling beliefs into a coherent framework.

King, on the other hand, had extensively studied and analyzed American (also known as Boston) Personalism for his graduate work at Boston University. His doctoral dissertation was a defense of personalism vis-à-vis the transcendentalist and existentialist view of God advanced by Tillich and the naturalist God imagined by Henry Nelson Wieman; his thesis argued that it was the personalist God—a personal God with a personality—who was able to answer human needs (Branch 102). The Boston school of Protestant personalism emphasized the idea of a God who was neither detached nor an objective absolute. As King would later write, “[p]ersonalism’s insistence that only personality—finite and infinite—is ultimately real strengthened me in two convictions: it gave me metaphysical and philosophical grounding for the idea of a personal God, and it gave me a metaphysical basis for the dignity and worth of all human personality” (King *Stride* 88). Boston personalism moreover convinced King that the personality could only be

developed in community (88). Indeed, while King was by no means a personalist above all else, his commitment to the person as the supreme unit of value, founded “absolutely in God and analogically in created persons,” rooted his approach to politics: God’s creation of each person became a claim for participation in other economies of “personhood” that did not always recognize the person’s divine image (Gacka “A Presentation of Personalism”). Boston personalism thus offered a religious foundation for discussions of political subjectivity that was distinct, as King’s dissertation argued, from transcendental idealism.

### **Day, King, and the Work of Love**

By the year of the first civil defense protest in 1955, Day had for almost twenty years headed the Catholic Worker (CW) newspaper and “movement,” a network of lay religious communities across the country and world with a loosely anarchic relation to each other and no official support from the Catholic hierarchy. Principally engaged in providing hospitality to the poor, the CW network had since the 1930s been rejecting the state in all of its forms, including institutionalized welfare and tax-exemption. “After their application has been filed, and after an investigation and long delays, clarifications, intercession, and urgings by lawyers—often an expensive and long-drawn-out procedure—this tax-exempt status is granted. As personalists, as an unincorporated group, we will not apply for this ‘privilege’” (qtd. in Boehrer 102). Refusing “to treat charity as a commodity,” the CW maintained its work should remain a personal sacrifice that moved “away from a self-centered individualism toward the good of the other...by taking personal responsibility for changing conditions, rather than by looking to the state or to other institutions to provide impersonal ‘charity’” (Ibid.; CW “Ways and Means” qtd in Coy 175). Committed to anarchist tenets premised in voluntary association, syndicalism, and direct action,

Day also refused to pay taxes, and while she favored expanded rights and recognitions vis-à-vis the state, she was skeptical of placing faith in bureaucracy or institutions. State legislation, Day maintained, could never repair the moral crisis of modern society: its reliance on ideas of mass responsibility would certainly not “bring us out of the morass we are floundering in” (Day “Catholic Worker Celebrates” qtd. in Weizer 123).

A communist-turned-Catholic libertarian who had been active in the labor and suffrage movements, Day had worked as a journalist for Marxist periodicals like *The Call* and *The Masses* before co-founding the Catholic Worker newspaper with itinerant French personalist Peter Maurin during the Depression. The first issue of their paper set the tone for the CW endeavor by asking readers, during an Old Left era dominated by hardline Marxist positions, whether it might be possible to be radical without being atheist. Despite losing much of its initially robust Catholic readership during the Spanish Civil War for refusing to support General Franco, and then again during the Second World War because of its resolutely pacifistic stance, the CW newspaper was often at odds with the positions of the U.S. Catholic leadership, which was reticent to disrupt its parishioners’ integration into the postwar middle class and national moral consensus (O’Brien 65). Despite its outlier positions, the CW newspaper remained in high circulation throughout the mid-century.<sup>7</sup> By the mid-1950s it had become “one of the few progressive publications available in the days of the early Cold War” (Garrison 69).

Day’s CW advocated small-scale religious practices and lifestyle choices—what she referred to as “the little way”—imagined to cultivate voluntary poverty, the value of work, and acts of sacrifice that, in bringing one closer to God, would also bring one closer to others. “It is only in the local, the personal, that one can see Christ” (Kauffman, “The Way of Love,” 232).

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<sup>7</sup> In 1952, the CW newspaper circulation sat at roughly 58,000, equal to the circulations of the *Nation* and *New Republic* combined (Macdonald, “The Foolish Things of the World,” pt. II, *The New Yorker*, Oct. 4, 1952).

This approach came from Day's favorite saint, St. Therese of Liseux, who was known for advancing a spirituality of the "little way" that emphasized the simple, quotidian calls of spirituality. Committing to the life of the little way espoused by St. Therese meant upholding the power of small acts—laboring for one's family, offering kindness to a stranger, sacrificing even something small for the good of another—as the marks of true faith. It also meant voluntarily cultivating the "austerity, the detachment, the self-discipline, the interior poverty" of a life lived in a restrained and controlled manner (Day *DD* 142-43).

Day's personal "little way" was comprised of a range of everyday duties that included maintaining the CW's networks of religious-based counter-communities, circulating its newspaper, and hosting and feeding the poor who came to its Houses of Hospitality looking for respite. To this list were added Day's social and religious activist commitments: publishing accounts of her conversion and of the work of the CW organization, speaking to social and religious groups, and offering solidarity and support to social protests and campaigns that seemed to share her mission. And, in June 1955, six months before the Montgomery boycott began, Day moreover became one of the nation's first antinuclear war demonstrators, engaging in a symbolic protest of the U.S.' first compulsory air raid drill for which she was subsequently incarcerated—arguably the beginning of the antinuclear movement.

Thus while Day by 1955 had decades of experience managing the CW network and was a recognized member of the U.S. protest community, the mid-1950s instead marked the beginning of King's public career. And while Day was well-known for her rejection of bourgeoisism and liberal models for piecemeal political change, King's work during this period is often misrecognized as straightforward progressive reform. Yet the Montgomery bus boycott, the first major civil rights effort in King's career, championed personal responsibility, sacrifice, and

divine aid as necessary conditions for social change in a matter that mobilized the idiom of liberalism to advance what was fundamentally a methodology of personalism. Oriented towards institutional change, King's discourse of Christian love and nonviolence appealed to the constituency of the national moral consensus and won him important liberal allies; however, it also promoted a more radical rejection of gradual race reform and, like Macdonald and Chiaromonte, advocated a conservative turn toward "Rediscovering Lost Values" and "Going Forward by Going Backwards" (Farrell 81).<sup>8</sup> Thus while it is typically the end of King's career that is considered evidence of the radical potential of his thought—his speeches challenging U.S. policy in Vietnam and advocating economic equality and human rights in the late 1960s—the personalist terms introduced during the Montgomery bus boycott communicate a radical personalist intervention underwriting King's leveraging of a Niebuhrian-inspired nationalist religious rhetoric: it underscored domestic racial injustice as damaging to U.S. foreign policy in a manner that advanced the needs of the disenfranchised blacks often excluded from the Cold War vision of the public sphere.

First introduced to the importance of socially minded Christianity through the activism of his father and grandfather, King had studied the intersect of theology with social ministry and community engagement at several educational institutions before becoming the minister at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama in 1955—where he quickly began expanding the patrician church's political and community activism. King was wary of the high emotionalism, fundamentalism, and political apathy he saw characterizing much of the black Baptist Church. His preaching and leadership during the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955-56 demonstrated a strong desire to undermine the "sincere feeling that ministers were not supposed

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<sup>8</sup> These are speeches King gave in 1954 and 1958 respectively.

to get mixed up in such earthly, temporal matters as social and economic improvement” but only “to ‘preach the gospel’ and keep men’s minds centered on ‘the heavenly’” (King *Stride* 23).

King’s pastoral work in the mid-1950s instead worked to mold the Montgomery protestors into recognizable political subjects by reminding them of the spiritual agency, rooted in suffering, that they already knew they possessed. Yet his framing of love as a transformative process of personalism opposed to the depersonalization of hate and discrimination was not the same as an embrace of progressive idealism. King cared about political efficacy, he just rethought the meaning of political realism:

Prior to reading Gandhi, I had about concluded that the ethics of Jesus were only effective in individual relationships. The ‘turn the other cheek’ philosophy and the ‘love your enemies’ philosophy were only valid, I felt, when individuals were in conflict with other individuals; when racial groups and nations were in conflict a more realistic approach seemed necessary. But after reading Gandhi, I saw how utterly mistaken I was. (King *Stride* 85).

Perhaps unsurprisingly given their divergent contexts, King and Day, while often listed together in the pantheon of important twentieth religious activists, are rarely considered interlocutors.<sup>9</sup> Though the two were never explicit partners and did not exchange correspondence, they did inhabit the same dissenting discourse world during the 1950s—one which advocated civil disobedience and nonviolence as a principled means for enacting loyalty to conscience before loyalty to the state. This association with the postwar network of U.S. radical pacifism, which by the 1950s had already fully translated Gandhian nonviolence into its political repertoire, was indexed by Day’s and King’s frequent interface with the nonviolent interfaith activist group Fellowship for Reconciliation (FOR) and its secular affiliate the War

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<sup>9</sup> Indeed, King and Day are directly compared, to my knowledge, only in the introduction of Cornel West’s anthology, *The Radical King*. While picking up on their shared commitment to radical love, however, West conflates King’s *agape* with Day’s martyr-like love, suggesting that King shared Day’s belief in a love “in which an egoistic self dies to be reborn into a courageous, loving, and sacrificial self” (West xvi).

Resisters League (WRL). Both King and Day had personal relationships with the major figures in this radical pacifist world, including Bayard Rustin, and were influenced by the work of A.J. Muste; both supported similar social and political initiatives using the methods of nonviolence and direct action,<sup>10</sup> including the Koinonia Farm community in Americus, Georgia; and both published pieces in David Dellinger's, Muste's, and Rustin's new pacifist magazine, *Liberation*, which debuted in 1956 and considered itself an "heir to *politics*" (Tracy 85).<sup>11</sup>

Day's and King's belief in the intersection of spirituality and community pivoted upon a shared discourse, present in both the Christian and nonviolent pacifistic traditions, that framed bearing undeserved earthly suffering as a practice of reparative love. For King and the black religious tradition more generally, earthly suffering had redemptive potential.<sup>12</sup> Taking up the typology of the Exodus narrative that had been circulating for decades in African-American religious discourse, King argued that racially motivated pain was a divine trial indexing a special relationship with God. He married this prophetic discourse to nonviolent resistance by conceptualizing love as a form of intimating Christ's example of turning the other cheek: in this sense nonviolence was "the love of God operating in the human heart" (King, "The Christian

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<sup>10</sup> It is worth noting that both King and Day participated in the huge draft card burning rally in Central Park of April 1967; as far as I can tell, this is the only time they were ever physically present at the same event. The following year, after King's assassination, both were honored in the same ceremony by the National Liturgical Conference at their "Revolution: Christian Responses" conference, which focused on Christian responses to war, violence, and hatred (*America* 8/17/1968, Vol. 119 Issue 4, p92).

<sup>11</sup> They begin putting out *Liberation* in 1956, and the magazine's inaugural issue situated itself as taking up the project begun a decade before by *politics*: "One of the symptoms of our time is that many people are fed up with 'politics'—by which they mean the whole machinery associated with political life. To become significant, politics must discover its ethical foundations and dynamite. The politics of the future requires a creative synthesis of the individual ethical insights of the great religious leaders and the collective social concern of the great revolutionists...From the synthesis of the ethical and the political emerges a new attitude toward utopianism in social and cultural thinking...The very presuppositions on which human relationships are based must be revolutionized. This makes it particularly difficult to live responsibly as individuals today and to carry on collective efforts for basic changes" (Goodman *Seeds of Liberation*, 7-9)

<sup>12</sup> Within this tradition "pain endured is often noted as a mechanism for refining the human. In this regard, King's theology might be said simply to affirm a long tradition of arguing for redemptive suffering that litters the religious theological geography of African American communities" (Pinn 61).

Way of Life”). King’s appeal was thus to love even the oppressor, without exception, seeking nothing in return.<sup>13</sup> It was an expression of *agape* that put God before the self.

We speak of a love which is expressed in the Greek word *agape*. *Agape* means nothing sentimental or basically affectionate. It means understanding, creative, redeeming goodwill for all men... When we rise to love on the *agape* level, we love men not because we like them, not because their attitudes and ways appeal to us, but we love them because God loves them. (King, “The Christian Way of Life”)

Loving the other, even the oppressor, meant loving the reflection of God in that person.

Recognizing their divine personhood. As others also made in the image and likeness of God.

Such love, moreover, made

no distinction between friend and enemy; it is directed toward both. If one loves an individual merely on account of his friendliness, he loves him for the sake of the benefits to be gained from the friendship, rather than for the friend’s own sake. Consequently, the best way to assure oneself that love is disinterested is to have love for the enemy-neighbor from whom you can expect no good in return, but only hostility and persecution. (King *Stride* 93)

A love best expressed when directed at those “from whom you can expect no good in return,”

King’s *agape* replaced an emotional or idealistic conception of love with love as a devotional

practice “not set in motion by any quality or function of its object”; a kind of love that required discipline and practice and which required the embrace of discomfort and even persecution (93).

It was also, however, an efficacious political tool, because this form of putting “Christianity in action” would “awaken the sense of moral shame within the opponent”—a shame with

behavioral implications that could transform actions (King, “The Christian Way of Life”). One’s

willingness to accept, and respond appropriately to, hatred and abuse with loving forbearance

and grace would be politically disruptive, while the experience of suffering and abjection it

entailed would also produce new forms of agency in the self, reorganizing black subjectivity by

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<sup>13</sup> King’s version of *agape* is a composite of several thinkers’ discussions of the concept but is certainly influenced by Tillich. See King’s dissertation, “A Comparison of the Conceptions of God in the Thinking of Paul Tillich and Henry Nelson Wieman.”

attesting to the spiritual personhood of both the receiver and the giver of love (Luker 51).

Compelling one to recognize the divine spirit at work in one's heart, *agape* would facilitate an intimacy with God that enabled one to live out one's personhood and also manifest it in contexts that interrupted existing social logics. Its ultimate "end is reconciliation. The aftermath of nonviolence is the creation of the beloved community" (King, "The Christian Way of Life").

Day similarly took up a tradition of love as suffering—hers rooted in a Catholic penitential framework that like King's Protestant one situated suffering as a burden facilitating greater intimacy with the divine. Conceiving of love as "a matter of the will" that was "a lifetime job," she maintained identification with the downtrodden as a means of expressing love for them: "we cannot even see our brothers in need without first tripping ourselves. It is the only way we have of showing love" (Day "Poverty and Precarity," *Little by Little* 109; Day *Little by Little* 7, "and a new social order were justice dwells," *House of Hospitality* 87). Looking to Catholic traditions associated with ascetic penance and mortification of the flesh—in the form of practices like sacrifice, self-denial, and, above all, embrace of the lifestyle of the poor—Day advocated expressions of self-abnegation that, in embodying one's love for the poor, brought one closer to God. Living in the austerity of CW Houses of Hospitality and rejecting the accumulation of material things, Day maintained that "[e]veryone wants to love...[b]ut 'willingness to bear discomfort,' willingness to suffer is the need. There is no love without it. Silence—suffering. God does the rest" (Day *DD* 226).

Indeed, the final page of *The Long Loneliness*, the autobiography Day wrote to share her story with those outside the Catholic faith, concluded with a resonant avowal that "the final word is love," which, "in the words of Father Zossima, [is] a harsh and dreadful thing" (Day, *LL* 363). This reference to Leo Tolstoy's Father Zossima—"Love in practice is a harsh and dreadful thing

compared to *love in dreams*”—manifested Day’s insistence that love was not a romantic or idealistic notion but a disciplined practice divorced from any association with pleasure or emotion:

If only we could learn that the only important thing is love, and that we will be judged on love—to keep on loving, and showing that love, and expressing that love, over and over, whether we feel it or not, seventy times seven, to mothers-in-law, to husbands, to children—and to be oblivious of insult, or hurt, or injury—not to see them, not to hear them. It is a hard, hard doctrine... God can change things in a twinkling of an eye. We have got to pray, to read the Gospel, to get frequent community, and not judge, not do anything but love, love, love a bitter lesson. Where there is no love, put love and you will take out love, St. John of the Cross says. (Day, letter to Dorothy Gauchat Feb 11 1958, in *All the Way to Heaven*, p. 245)

Voluntary poverty, constituted by practices of sacrifice and self-giving, both made such love possible and were its manifestation. In this sense, the voluntary poverty she advocated was distinct from destitution in that it reflected a state of “freedom that comes when there is nothing one fears to lose,” rather than an institutionalized form of sinful injustice (*Little by Little* xxxv).

Stridently opposed to mainstream mid-century “acculturationist, upwardly mobile Catholicism,” and the self-interest and materialism with which she associated it, Day’s martyrial position rejected bourgeois security in favor of the values she associated with the forms of immigrant Catholicism that had originally motivated her conversion in the 1930s (Fisher 32). “I have said, sometimes flippantly,” she wrote, “that the masses of bourgeois smug Christians who denied Christ in his poor made me turn to Communism, and that it was the Communists and working with them that made me turn to God” (Day, “Intro to *From Union Square to Rome*” 7). She accordingly promoted a type of asceticism and service to the dispossessed in which willingness to suffer and bear discomfort were understood to dissolve autonomous subjectivity

and fuse it to the divine.<sup>14</sup> For “[w]e cannot love God unless we love each other” (Day, *LL* 363). In this sense, sacrificial, self-abnegating love was at the heart of Day’s vision of community, indexing a “move away from a self-centered individualism toward the good of the other” through assuming an embodied “personal responsibility for changing conditions” rather than reliance on state institutions to care for others (Coy 175).

“[W]e have all known the long loneliness and we have learned that the only solution is love and that love comes with community” (Day, *LL* 363). Day’s vision of “working for ‘a new heaven and a new *earth*, wherein justice dwelleth,” of “trying to say with action, ‘Thy will be done on *earth* as it is in heaven” meant living “as though we believed indeed that we are all members of one another” (Day, “Aim and Purposes,” *LL* 91). Living out a harsh and dreadful love toward others meant manifesting the communion that already existed through Christ in the form of unions, cooperatives, credit unions, farming communes, and above all, the CW Houses of Hospitality (91). Open to “whoever showed up at the door,” these homes were

a microcosm of sorts, a family, as Dorothy would say, and an example of the possibility of a diverse group of individuals residing together in relative harmony, without the need of elaborate rules. The basis for community was not an ideal to be achieved, but the recognition of a reality already accomplished in Christ—the fact that all, whether clever or dull, fit or infirm, beautiful or plain, were ‘members of one another’. (*Little by Little* xvii)

The open-door policy approach to community meant serving, and expressing love for, anyone who knocked—which Day recognized as an often trying task.

Thus unlike the ethics of Macdonald and Chiaromonte—which were underwritten by the affection, satisfaction, and fraternity created by affinity and likemindedness—Day and King theorized an inclusive love founded upon embracing suffering and hostility. Practicing such a

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<sup>14</sup> Day made a distinction between the poor and the destitute; the poor were forced to live simply and therefore were both in need but also had a mode of being that made space for communion with the divine; the destitute were in such a state of privation that this was impossible. Destitution was not to be taken as a model but eradicated.

love, they argued, counteracted the pathologizing depersonalization produced by racism or poverty by helping believers to recognize themselves and others as made in the likeness of God. As the everyday acts bearing out the burden of this love transfigured individuals, it would facilitate social cohesion in the form of harmonious, suprapersonal spiritual community.

Day's and King's models for this process, however, were inverted: consummate critic of the bourgeois and anxious about the moral bankruptcy she saw in liberal subjectivity, Day endorsed self-dissolution. The radical identification with the poor and the outcast that she advocated through asceticism and sacrifice extended beyond liberal solidarity to entail taking up, literally living out, the life of the other. The emphasis on renouncing one's own pleasures and desires in order to be close to the dispossessed pivoted upon putting the other, and therefore the divine in whose image she was made, before the self—a form of self-abnegation that Day believed facilitated a falling apart of the autonomous subject that would open it up to more intimate relation with the divine. Such a union with God demanded rejection of claims to autonomy and sufficiency. It was small, everyday acts of love, renunciation, and suffering that enacted this process: erasure of self through little practices of exalting the other and venerating Christ became a religious experience akin to the sublime, in which the presumption of self-sovereignty was replaced by recognition of one's divine intersubjectivity. Day thus did not maintain that small acts would result in immediate political change, but she did maintain their potential for spiritual change, which, she had faith, would incite political change as well—though perhaps on a time frame different from the one upheld by most activists.

King instead responded to the ways that racism obstructed African American social, political, and legal personhood by founding them on religious personhood: *agape* demanded a faith so strong that it would consolidate the subject in ways recognizable to the logics of the

state, which largely meant the forms of autonomous agency presumed by bourgeois liberalism. Demanding fortitude and forbearance, *agape* would allow the subject to recognize herself as not a damaged victim of racial discrimination but a participant in a larger spiritual community that was materialized politically. Helping people to recognize their religious personhood as instilling them with a divinely inspired form of self-sovereignty was a means of ushering the Montgomery protestors into the political domain from which they had long been alienated. However, this process pivoted upon non-liberal practices for producing such agency, which married progressive charges of institutional injustices to appeals to self-reliance that elevated the values of suffering, redemption, and divine aid. Framing suffering of undeserved burdens as a form of spiritual training that was ultimately liberatory, King's *agape* sits uneasily with liberal claims about rights and reciprocity, imagining the practice of turning the other cheek to facilitate transformation of the suffering subject into a courageous, sovereign agent. This figure would then help to manifest politically a form of community based on equality first experienced spiritually. Thus while both Day and King imagined love as a form of imitating of Christ, they essentially embraced inverted models of subjectivity—though with ultimately the same goal of spiritual and social unity.

### **The Civil Defense Drills and the Personal Politics of Penance**

The Civil Defense protests help to illuminate what Day's spiritual politics of the little way looked like in practice. The protests were conceived in response to U.S. civil defense programming, which, established in the 1940s to protect civilians from wartime threats, grew to unprecedented dimensions in the mid-1950s as Cold War tensions mounted. Intended as a branch of national security to protect the home front and its domestic population, civil defense encompassed both the U.S.'s nuclear deterrence policy and its attempts to legitimize that policy

through cultivating public support for the development of nuclear weapons and controlling public perceptions of the consequences of potential war (Garrison 7-8). Civil defense thus comprised a set of policies, safety measures, and guidelines engineered to train and prepare the public for a potential nuclear attack, with the goal of minimizing damages. While it is clear that U.S. policymakers were aware it was not *actually* possible to protect the U.S. population through such measures, they nonetheless hoped that civil defense programming would help to produce the extensive political capital deemed necessary to enact the types of preemptive nuclear policies that might in fact protect the citizenry by preventing domestic attacks (Garrison 36). In this sense, civil defense constituted a series of initiatives attempting to convince the U.S. population that survival of nuclear attack was possible *enough* that it was worthwhile to assume the risks inherent to politically supporting national Cold War programming. “Deterrence strategy rested on public willingness to risk nuclear war, in the mythical belief that the national population could absorb and survive a first strike, in order to eliminate the enemy in a second strike” (Ibid. 36). It functioned on the belief that citizens “would accept the risks of nuclear war only if they could be assured that a nuclear attack on their own cities would not be too costly” (Oakes 6). Circulation of misinformation about the effects of nuclear testing and the perils presented by nuclear arms accumulation facilitated this process.

Rehearsals of nuclear attacks and media “education” campaigns were key components of the 1950s civil defense program. And in 1955, participation in the largest of these rehearsals, Operation Alert, was ruled compulsory. Operation Alert, which became an annual nuclear air raid drill in major U.S. cities, was intended to serve as “an enactment of an imaginary nuclear attack on the United States” (Garrison 70). Citizens were legally required, upon penalties of \$500 and up to a year in jail, to take cover for fifteen minutes during the drill, while a scripted drama

staged the progressive phases of the virtual “attack” with sound effects and costumes (Ibid. 70-71, 74). To make the simulation as real as possible, “a five-minute program was broadcast coincident with the simulated attack warning, and another five-minute program was broadcast coincident with the simulated attack imminent stages”; these programs included “running news accounts of the simulated evacuation” (Davis 185). The event was envisioned as a demonstration of the nation’s competency, a form of reassurance to citizens of the state’s preparedness, and as evidence of the U.S.’ capacity to maintain continuity of government during a nuclear crisis. Staged photographs were circulated of President Eisenhower and his advisors manifesting calm and confidence. Operation Alert was also filmed in some locations so that citizens could later review the behavior of their peers for instruction (Oakes 96).

Not all cities agreed to participate in Operation Alert and several that did saw protests. The only demonstrators actually arrested for their dissent during Operation Alert in 1955, however, were participants in the act of noncompliance organized by Day and her peers in New York. The New York protest was comprised of a small group of about 28 local activists, primarily radical pacifists, associated with the CW, FOR, and the WRL—and it notably included both Muste and Rustin in addition to Day (Garrison 69). The protesters, who had been reminded of their collective commitment to nonviolence before setting out for the protest, refused to leave the City Hall Park benches upon which they sat when the air raid sirens went off. After being approached by the police, they refused to take shelter. Continuing to sit, they were arrested and taken to a police station for booking. They all spent at least one night in prison. Most were released within a few days on bail, which had been raised to the exorbitant amount of \$1,500 after a dramatic courtroom confrontation during which the judge accused the protestors of being “murders” and held “them responsible for the mock deaths of almost 3 million New Yorkers

killed during the air raid drill” (Garrison 46). For those, including Day, who pled guilty, this prison time was followed by an ongoing court case.

National press coverage of the protest was limited, though *Harpers Bazar* wrote an article defending the protestors and some local papers also provided accounts of their noncompliance. The liberal Catholic periodical *Commonweal*, for which Day occasionally wrote, supported her action, as did the CW newspaper, but general public attention to the event was relatively minimal. Still, both the Civil Defense drill and the protest were repeated again in 1956—and the next year, and the following. Day was arrested and pled guilty every time. It took several years for these civil defense protests to gain much notoriety, but by the end of the 1950s, they had begun to garner public attention and increasingly favorable media coverage. By 1960, there were over 1,000 participants at the annual New York protest (Piehl 88).<sup>15</sup> It was testament to the “little way.”

Considering the elaborate ways in which Operation Alert was staged by the state as a symbolic ritual, it is unsurprising that the dissenting response took the form of a counter-ritual (Oakes 80). From the start, the protest demonstration was planned as a counter-spectacle that would disrupt the logic it saw organizing the event, which the 1955 Catholic Worker pamphlet advertising the protest identified as preparation “of the collective mind for war” (CW 1955 pamphlet). The Civil Defense protest was therefore entirely conscious of itself as a chiefly symbolic gesture of disturbance rather than a realistic tactical move. Indeed, to try to increase the protest’s public presence, the 1955 demonstrators had alerted “the Federal Bureau of Investigation, city authorities, and the media of their intent to defy the new law” (Garrison 74). Day arrived at the park in 1955 bearing a statement explicitly prepared “to be read before the

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<sup>15</sup> The drills were finally dismantled in 1962.

news reel camera,” while Rustin had instructed the protestors before commencing to raise their signs high enough to be seen by the cameras (Day “Where are the Poor?”, Garrison 75).

All the organizations participating in the event had circulated leaflets prior to the protest. The Catholic Worker’s contribution was a particularly lengthy three-page pamphlet bearing the ominous heading “Fear is now the American way of life” (CW 1955 pamphlet). The document charged the U.S. government with using the atomic bomb and the Cold War to compel “its citizens to assist in the buildup of mass hysteria” (CW 1955 pamphlet). Compulsory civil defense, it argued, was an obvious attempt by the state, in full awareness of the insufficiency of true defense systems against atomic warfare, to beguile its citizenry. “In the name of Freedom we are now being enslaved,” the pamphlet argued (CW 1955 pamphlet), and

[i]n the name of Jesus, who is God, who is love, we will not obey this order to pretend, to evacuate, to hide. In view of the certain knowledge the administration of this country has that there is no defense in atomic warfare, we know this drill to be a military act in a cold war to instill fear, to prepare the collective mind for war. We refuse to cooperate. (CW 1955 pamphlet)

Taking aim at the newfound practices of “informing” on peers and giving loyalty oaths that were accompanying the state’s call to hysteria, the pamphlet spurred its readers to “act like Christians” and take up their Christian duty to “make this again a free country” by refusing to participate in the war effort. The leaflet listed several non-cooperative acts that Christians could perform to manifest spiritual protest against the logic of the state: not only disobeying the compulsory air raid drills but also declining to register for the draft and refusing to buy war bonds, pay income tax, or serve jury duty.

The CW pamphlet hinged on the argument that reliance on atomic warfare was tantamount to putting faith in the bomb over faith in God. And it framed non-cooperation as an act of personal responsibility called for by Christian faith: “We will have a better world when we

have a better people, so let us commence this revolution within ourselves. Nothing can stop us except our own fear and lack of faith” (CW 1955 pamphlet). Readers were urged towards “a centering of our lives on the spiritual truths which in our quiet moments we all know to be of greatest value,” as opposed to acquiescing to, or ignoring, policies they knew justified violence, force, and injustice in the name of democracy. In this sense, Day’s appeal to conscience, putting loyalty God above loyalty to the nation, was a direct rejection of the national discourse conflating democratic aims with religious behavior. The ends could never justify the means.

Yet unlike other participants in the Operation Alert protest who shared some of these views, and whose principal objectives were to denounce civil defense itself, Day and the Catholic Workers also explicitly framed this civil disobedience as a gesture that moved beyond dissent to serve as “an act of penance for our guilt as citizens of a country which used the atom bomb at Hiroshima and Nagasaki” (CW “What is Happening? Trial Continued”). The premises and implications of this stance are worth unravelling: while upholding a general pacifistic political critique of atomic warfare and anarchistic rejection of the role of technocratic mass society, the Catholic Workers, mobilized by Day, also situated their noncompliance as a sacrificial act of assuming personal responsibility for collective sins. A personal politics of penance.

“We are engaging only ourselves in this action, not the Church,” Day specified in her prepared statement for the cameras, and later in the CW paper. “We are acting as individual Catholics.” The protestors did not imagine themselves representatives of the Catholic Church; they were prompted to action by their own faith, not an institution. Yet they were also personally performing penance for a sinful act they had neither completed or condoned but were guilty of merely “as citizens of a country which used the atom bomb at Hiroshima and Nagasaki” (CW

“What is Happening? Trial Continued”). The personal sacrifice of being jailed and persecuted for their protest was framed as a precondition of repair for the greater U.S. community being destroyed by its worship of nuclear war and culture of fear. Repentance for collective sin is not part of the Catholic penitential tradition: atonement instead is a voluntary performance of sacrificial acts for one’s own past sins—a form of self-disciplining understood to anticipate and prepare oneself for a less sinful future. By framing their political protest as personal penance for collective sin, Day and the Catholic Workers essentially fused spiritual and political citizenships in a manner that left one always and only responsible as a single person but also fundamentally constituted by one’s belonging to the larger community of the Mystical Body of Christ. Performance of a high-risk act like civil defense protest was a means of acknowledging spiritual and politically belonging at the same time, at the expense of personal social standing or livelihood. For “[w]e are living in this world and must make choices now, choices which may mean the sacrifice of our lives, in the future, but for now our goods, our reputations even... We must give up our lives to gain them” (*Little by Little* “Inventory,” 105).

This rhetoric of high-stakes faith and symbolic penitential performance was nonetheless underwritten by Day’s commitment to the “small moments able to increase our faith and enlarge our hearts,” the little ways of personalism (*Little by Little* “Inventory,” 105). Her account of being arrested for participation in the 1955 civil defense protest, for instance, which was published in the following issue of the CW paper, is an expression of personal gratitude for her prison experience—which was neither her first nor last: thankfulness for “the opportunity to be there, to be so stripped of all the earth holds dear, to share in some little way the life of prisoners, guilty and innocent, all over the world” (Day “Where are the poor?”).<sup>16</sup> Indeed when Macdonald

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<sup>16</sup> A second account of “picketing in penance,” this one in honor of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the dropping of the atom bomb, was printed beside Day’s account of her arrest and time in jail (CW July-Aug 1955).

profiled Day in a two-part essay for the *New Yorker* in 1952, he described her as “personal all the time” and “personal all the way,” because she integrated “homey” tales of the CW “family” with philosophic inquiry, “introducing the sublime to the commonplace” by linking the serious with the trivial (Macdonald “Foolish Things” pt. II).<sup>17</sup> In this typical fashion, Day’s article on the protest provides an eminently subjective, detailed perspective on the demonstration and her subsequent incarceration, noting the weather, how the protestors prepared for the drill, where they ate lunch, their varied motivations for participating, how the police station looked and felt, and the types of relationships that unfolded within the women’s jail cell.

Throughout her career, Day’s writing had consistently integrated her own experience and the experiences of those around her into a personalistic catechism.<sup>18</sup> Moving from one anecdote or occurrence to the next, her articles often did not demonstrate a strong argument so much as a consistent voice. Day’s approach “was largely intuitive: she identified with the victims of social misfortune, which she understood to be systemic,” and made her case through anecdotes, accounts framed by her interpretations, and intuitive appeals (Chatfield 1). Trained as journalist in social realist newspapers, Day remained strongly rooted in the quotidian details of her life and the lives of those around her. She was moreover fond of interweaving lines drawn from novels with the writings of saints or introducing lines from scripture or recent publication reviews into her writing. The integration and choice of these citations was always based on what was meaningful to her personally, meaning that Day’s idiosyncratic, at times contradictory, and often meandering style brought more of “distinctive social conscience” than a unified ideology

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<sup>17</sup> Macdonald’s article expressed admiration for the *Catholic Worker* paper and Day’s work for it. See Macdonald, *New Yorker*, “The Foolish Things of the World,” pts. I and II, in *The New Yorker*, and Oct. 4 and 10, 1952.

<sup>18</sup> This approach also resulted in the invention of the character of Ben Joe Labray, a composite figure characterized by features of several real people. Day encouraged CW readers to describe their experiences in Ben Joe’s name: an apostle and a bum (Fisher 66).

(Chatfield 1). Permeated as it was with attachment to personal experiences, private details, and subjective accounts that rejected the concept of a depersonalized aesthetic object, Day's style also pointed out her own flaws and failings with humor:

We were out walking last spring and exploring down below the arrogant heights and we were delighted to be assailed by the stockyard smells of a slaughterhouse. 'Delighted,' I say? That is class-warrish, to be delighted at some slight sharing of the rich in the miseries of the poor. But I must admit my delight and hug it to me. I do penance through my nose continually. (*House of Hospitality* 53)

Day's written account of the 1955 civil defense protest and her imprisonment likewise juxtaposes her feelings with those of the other prisoners, who, inhabiting conditions of "inhuman crowding" after being booked on misdemeanors, were "packed like animals for shipment in cages" (Day "Where Are the Poor"). Day found this imprisonment an opportunity for close encounter with many who, she argued, had been imprisoned for their poverty: brought to jail for "sleeping in the parks, selling neckties on the street corners, begging alms. These are the poor who fill the jails, and occupy the courts" (ibid.). The sense of solidarity that Day's account attributed to the disparate group of prisoners in her cell, the acts of kindness and spontaneous goodwill she witnessed in the encounters between her fellow protestors and their prison mates, become evidence of the spiritual value of living among the poor.

Indeed, to conclude her article about the protest, Day framed voluntary poverty as a biblical imperative by drawing upon a familiar dialogue from Mathew between Christ and a group of complacent followers oblivious to the true call of the Sermon on the Mount: "'When were you in prison Lord, and we did not visit you?'," they ask. "'Inasmuch as you did not visit these prisoners ye did not visit Me'," they are told.<sup>19</sup> Without rhetorically marking the reference, Day resituates this familiar citation within the context of her prison experience, incorporating the

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<sup>19</sup> This is a reference to Mathew 25:44.

dismissals of the poor and the prisoner dominant in her historical moment into the response of Christ's self-satisfied audience:

But they are guilty, they are the scum of the earth, they are the refuse, they are the offscourings. They drink, they take dope, they are prostitutes. They are vicious themselves and they make others vicious. They even sell drugs to little children. They are where they belong. Prison is too good for them. We can't pamper them. ("Where Are the Poor")

The rejoinder, though again not rhetorically marked, is intended to be interpellated as the words of Christ: "I am more with these most miserable ones than with the judges sitting on the high seats" (Ibid.).

The authorial voice then shifts back to Day for a final comment: "This is not sentimentality," she concludes, a clear rejection of association of caring for the poor with bourgeois idealism.

This is truth. Oh yes, one can hear these things very plainly lying in a cell when we were finally permitted to lie down, locked in again in these rows of cages, in a bare stark cell that would outdo the Carmelite in austerity. It was good to kneel there on the floor beside the bed and thank God for the opportunity to be there, to be so stripped of all the earth holds dear to share in some little way the life of prisoners, guilty and innocent, all over the world. ("Where Are the Poor")

Mistreatment—being treated not as persons but as animals—and extreme asceticism here reveal themselves as moments enabling intimacy with the divine through sharing "in some little way the life of prisoners, guilty and innocent, all over the world," a form physical proximity to the disinherited that enabled one to hear "very plainly" the words of Christ (Ibid.). In Day's CW article, this final mystical moment becomes the outcome of the collective penance manifested by the protest.

"[I]t is mass action people think of these days. They lose sight of the sacrament of the present moment—of the little way," Day had explained in the CW paper in 1951. "Martyrdom is

not gallantly standing before a firing squad...Usually it is the losing of a job (and so the means to life) because of not taking a loyalty oath, or buying a war bond, or paying a tax” (*CW* “Inventory” Jan 1951). This type of faith was a challenge to the expanding bureaucratic and state-centered institutionalization of life, a championing of personal responsibility that reclaimed the accountability for social life that Day argued had devolved to the state. Focus on the local was imagined to afford greater space to see Christ in daily life: “The significance of the little things we leave undone! The protests we do not make, the stands we do not take, we who are living in the world!” (Day, “No Party Line”).

The Catholic Worker network itself reflected this wariness of collectivity in its dispersed, anarchic organization. Day, who was cautious about encouraging others to consider her too much of an authority, found her insistence on personal responsibility constantly challenged as uncomfortable for those socialized to cede responsibility to others:

Low in mind all day, full of tears. What with the Easton, New York, Boston, Ottawa, Toronto, and Missouri groups, all discouraged, all looking for organization instead of self-organization, all of them weary of the idea of freedom and responsibility—I feel bitterly oppressed, yet confirmed in the conviction that we have to emphasize personal responsibility at all costs (*Little by Little* “Only the Will Remains” 74)

Following a syndicalist philosophy, the Houses of Hospitality were headed not by committees but house leaders, who held personal responsibility for each house’s smooth running, so that when mistakes were made, all knew what their responsibility was to repair them (Day *All the Way to Heaven* 167). Insistence on personal responsibility as a moral obligation, “*increased* responsibility of one person to another, of the individual to the community,” demanded integrating sacrifice into one’s conception of faith in a manner that challenged the forms of integrationist mainstream Catholicism Day saw characterizing the U.S. mid-century, which were invested in social acceptance and upward mobility (Coles 96, O’Brien 110). Day considered this

acculturationist and gentrifying Catholic ethos directly opposed to the “immigrant Catholicism” constituted by strong ethnic communities, poverty, and an outcast status that had originally drawn her to God.

Day was especially skeptical of the rise of Catholic anticommunism during the Cold War, which had only increased opportunities for Catholic social mobility as “anticommunism [became] an article of national faith” (Fisher 153-4). Indeed, during this period, even the progressive-minded *Commonweal* was upholding mainline U.S. foreign policy positions (Klejment and Roberts 154).<sup>20</sup> In distinctly rejecting these discourses, which situated democracy as itself a holy cause, Day not only disavowed the overlap between national and spiritual citizenship, she moreover maintained that responsible expression of both meant penance and prayer, sacrifice and faith. The form of integrationist belonging sought by mainstream Catholics, she argued, could never assuage their desire for community, which in fact could only be located through the forms of devotion that facilitated spiritual intimacy. “Victims of the long loneliness,” it was only by becoming ““pilgrims and strangers on earth”” that could they find true fellowship (Fisher 47).

“Sometimes when people call me a ‘utopian,’” Day would later tell psychiatrist Robert Coles in an interview, “I say, no, I just have a different sense of time than many others” (Coles 96).<sup>21</sup> Day never set out “to prove that our technique of working with the poor is useful, or to prove that we are able to be effective humanitarians” (96-97). The little way was never imagined to be conducive to sweeping or rapid organized change. And indeed, Day’s goal of

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<sup>20</sup> *Commonweal* generally represented the “liberal Catholic” perspective in the 40s and 50s. It spoke to an educated audience and advanced the ideals of progressive liberalism, human freedom, democracy, and social justice (Van Allen 116). The more radical and libertarian CW stood against the type of liberal centralization that *Commonweal* supported, but Day did occasionally write articles for the paper, and it was through one its editors that she met Maurin in the 30s.

<sup>21</sup> Coles’s work documents many of the events and figures of catalyzing “moral” change in the period spanned by this dissertation. He serves as a link between the figures in this chapter and those in the next.

encouraging “community life which would be loyal to the teaching in the Sermon on the Mount” would never intervene in the political field with the type of measurable success experienced by King (Coles 109). Nor was it her aim. Instead, Day’s object was not the remedy of particular social problems but repair of people’s “attitudes...their moral lives...their overall ethical purpose as human beings” and a desire to affect their “everyday lives—their manner of living with one another” through a change in their *experience* of religion and what it meant to be one with Christ (Ibid. 96, Fisher 52). If nonviolent dissent was one way of sacrificing—was “in a little way a dying”—it was premised on a continued call to embrace the experience of the disinherited as a means of seeking Christ in his martyrdom (Ibid. 52). This version of personal politics envisioned small acts as part of a larger procession, a chain, ushering in a Christian social order:

‘I think our job is to do the best we can to hold up our small segment of the chain. That’s one kind of localism, I guess, and one kind of politics—doing your utmost to keep that chain connected, unbroken. Our arms are linked—we try to be neighbors of His, and to speak up for his principles. That’s a lifetime’s job’ (Coles 109).

If for Day the crisis of modern social experience was a “loneliness” deriving from an isolation that was both spiritual and political, “she could not locate existing institutional structures that would relieve her felt trauma or offer a place of synthesis” (Morton and Saltmarsh 239-40). Having located her own answer to long years of such loneliness not in the collective political activism of her Marxist years but in personal connection with Mystical Body of Christ, Day took up a personalist position that merged her social commitments to intimacy with the divine. Her civil defense dissent, crystallizing her belief that the most spiritually meaningful acts were those entailing personal sacrifice in the name of a greater whole, disrupted the nationalistic logic “preparing the collective mind for war” by opening space for a more meaningful form of belonging.

## The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Spiritual Work of Nonviolence

King's personalist ethics similarly manifested in the 1950s as a politics advancing a new Christian social order. King's work surrounding the Montgomery bus boycott exhibits how, as Louis E. Lomax has noted, his work during the period was perceived as uniquely able to help "Negroes understand how they themselves feel and why they feel as they do"—a personalist approach that framed racial discrimination as a spiritual affair and yet called for people "to seek solution on this side of the Jordan, not in the life beyond death" (qtd. in Brooks 100). The Montgomery bus boycott officially began when Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat after a long day of work on December 1, 1955. Though often framed as a dignified but circumstantial hero, chosen by history, Parks had in fact been trained as a political activist and was working as a secretary for the local NAACP at the time of her arrest (Wilson 300). Local black community leaders, including individuals at the NAACP, had been contemplating a protest of bus segregation for at least a year prior to the Montgomery boycott, and though several women had been arrested in 1955 for disobeying segregation laws, it was decided that Parks's arrest presented the ideal case around which to organize a mass protest because of her middle-class respectability and values.<sup>22</sup> Organizers recognized that, in terms of inspiring the community, it was important that Parks was a woman, as unlike men they were generally given at least some respect by bus drivers. It was moreover significant that Parks was an employed Christian woman who subscribed to recognizable morals; her uprightness and hard work only underscored the injustice of her mistreatment (300).<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> As Kirt Wilson reminds us, "In March and October of 1955, first Claudette Colvin and then Mary Louise Smith refused to surrender their seats to white passengers. These young black women were arrested, tried, and convicted; furthermore, Montgomery's black leaders, perhaps with the assistance of Parks herself, discussed whether to use their cases to challenge segregation. In both instances, they decided that moral improprieties in the young women's backgrounds made the cases indefensible" (Wilson 300-301).

<sup>23</sup> Evidence of this is feeling present in both in King's account of the boycott in *Stride Toward Freedom* and in his first speech for the boycott, given at Holt Street church. In that address he reminded his audience, "Mrs. Rosa Parks

Within hours of Parks's arrest, flyers were circulated around Montgomery to publicize a bus protest the following Monday, which was observed with surprising uniformity across the black community. The Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) was quickly created to coordinate and sustain this boycott, with King nominated as its leader—likely because, new to the city, he had not yet been drawn into its fractious local politics (Branch). During the initial days of the protest, it was unclear how long the boycott would last, but few envisioned a full twelve months would pass before it was concluded. Yet as the boycott progressed, bombs were set off, participants (including King) were arrested, and the lawsuit against Alabama bus segregation that had been raised by the boycott organizers travelled up to the Supreme Court. As it extended in time, the boycott grew, evolving to confront new obstacles presented by the white community and to cope with the practical difficulties entailed by avoiding public transit. The MIA, for instance, began organizing an elaborate carpooling system and coordinated a series of mass meetings intended to maintain morale and circulate information. It was not until December 20, 1956, over a year later, that the Supreme Court decision nullifying bus segregation finally took effect, and the boycott ended in success.

Yet when King was appointed leader of the nascent MIA in early December of 1955 all of that was still in the future. King's inaugural MIA duty was to speak at the boycott's first mass meeting, a rally held at Holt Street church at the end of the first day off the buses. Speaking to an overflowing crowd, King's first address quickly framed the boycott in symbolic terms that married the political and spiritual exigency of the protest and established two points: firstly, that

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is a fine person. (*Well, well said*) And since it had to happen I'm happy that it happened to a person like Mrs. Parks, for nobody can doubt the boundless outreach of her integrity. (*Sure enough*) Nobody can doubt the height of her character, (*Yes*) nobody can doubt the depth of her Christian commitment and devotion to the teachings of Jesus. (*All right*) And I'm happy since it had to happen, it happened to a person that nobody can call a disturbing factor in the community. (*All right*) Mrs. Parks is a fine Christian person, unassuming, and yet there is integrity and character there. And just because she refused to get up, she was arrested" (King, Holt Street Address).

the boycott had political legitimacy—an argument aimed at an audience that extended beyond those present in the church. (Indeed, the mass meeting was covered by local and regional reporters and two television cameras). And secondly, that the religious identity of the protestors had eminently political implications. Disavowal of violence was central to both of these objectives. Thus, when King took to the pulpit, though the meeting had begun with “all of the characteristics of a religious service,” the atmosphere in the Holt Street church quickly turned toward the political register with King’s speech (Wilson 304). For “although its form and performance resembled a traditional Southern black sermon,” King’s “content was explicitly political” (Ibid. 304).

King opened by addressing the audience as “first and foremost American citizens,” going on to locate the Montgomery boycott in a long history that situated Parks’s individual mistreatment as one of “numerous cases...lost in the thick fog of oblivion” experienced by black Americans (King, “Holt Street Speech”). Emphasizing the *legality* of the bus boycott, the boycotters’ democratic right and duty to protest, King moved from the inevitable dehumanizing effects of prolonged mistreatment—“we are here this evening because we’re tired now”—to rejection of the common response to it: violence. Rejecting violence, King argued, was a moral obligation, premised in the Holt street audience’s collective Christian citizenship:

we are not here advocating violence. (*No*) We have never done that. (*Repeat that, Repeat that*) I want it to be known throughout Montgomery and throughout this nation (*Well*) that we are Christian people. (*Yes*) We believe in the Christian religion. We believe in the teachings of Jesus. (*Well*) The only weapon that we have in our hands this evening is the weapon of protest. (*Yes*) That's all.

As King underscored the legitimacy of the boycott as an expression of dissent, he concomitantly marked protest as a holy weapon. Establishing the justness of the boycott on the basis of

prolonged abuse of the audience's rights as U.S. citizens, King also emphasized their nonviolent response as an index of the boycott's Christian banner.

Thus conjoining the political with the spiritual, King mobilized the rhetoric of the larger national discourse affirming the sacredness of democracy, which was rooted in the dual sacred powers of the Constitution and God:

certainly, this [protest] is the glory of America, with all of its faults. (*Yeah*) This is the glory of our democracy. If we were incarcerated behind the iron curtains of a Communistic nation we couldn't do this. If we were dropped in the dungeon of a totalitarian regime we couldn't do this. (*All right*) But the great glory of American democracy is the right to protest for right. (*That's right*). And we are not wrong, we are not wrong in what we are doing. (*Well*) If we are wrong, the Supreme Court of this nation is wrong. (*Yes sir*) If we are wrong, the Constitution of the United States is wrong. (*Yes*) If we are wrong, God Almighty is wrong. If we are wrong, Jesus of Nazareth was merely a utopian dreamer that never came down to earth. (*Ibid.*)

In this way, King situated the local Montgomery conflict as yet another instance proving the validity of a wider international political discussion, expanding the particular Montgomery situation into a more abstract intervention in the political domain just as he had reframed the personal struggle of Parks as part of longer shared history. What had first been an individual act of defiance was thus recalibrated as an inherently personalist one, while the town's protest was recontextualized as an event underwritten by divine purpose that framed the boycotters' activities as public acts affecting the world stage. This rhetorical move moreover directly spoke to the concerns of policymakers and politicians, strategically arguing that issues like segregation were "a headache for U.S. elites because they were an embarrassment for Cold War propaganda in Africa and Asia" (Hulsether 174).

It is worth underscoring how important King's figuring of the political through use of familiar religious imagery and metaphors was for his audience. Political concepts were alienating for much of King's Holt Street audience, which "was not accustomed to political action, or to

viewing political action as an extension of religious commitments” (Selby 69). Black churches in the U.S. did not historically have a habit of acting significantly or *en masse* with regard to political or social issues. King himself acknowledged the prevalent impression that era’s Black church leaders, as middle-class pillars of the black community, often “sold out” to white power structures (King “Annual Address Institute on Nonviolence and Social Change”). Interest in greater political and social activism on the part of the black church is one that King, for instance, brought to Dexter Avenue Baptist when he moved to Montgomery, and one which required the establishment of new policies, precedents, and committees there in order to take effect and negate the existing tendencies of the church’s upper-class parishioners. It is thus fair to say that King’s Holt Street audience was unaccustomed to being politically mobilized—and certainly not adapted to thinking of itself politically, especially in the pew. Comments like “we are determined here in Montgomery to work and fight until justice runs down like water (*Yes*) and righteousness like a mighty stream” rhetorical commensurated the congregation’s political and religious identities to argue that personal beliefs and actions carried important political content.

Proclaiming great significance for the boycott from this first address, King essentially constituted a rhetorical reality and meaning for the protest that preceded its fulfillment as a recognizable *event*. King first hailed a sense of collective fellowship on the part of protestors that had not yet been consolidated (Selby 57, 70). The black population of Montgomery had little experience of standing together across denominational and class lines as a united community. King’s religious language and figurations cultivated a sense of identity and legitimacy for the boycott as it faced the world, positioning the boycotters’ religious personhood as the base from which Montgomery’s citizens should also consider themselves political agents. Declaring God to be on the side of the boycotters, who like the Israelites were being led from the desert, King,

their Moses, highlighted their faith as their point of strength (Selby 42). When he described the boycott as a “movement” sparked when “God decided to use Montgomery as the proving ground for the struggle and triumph of freedom and justice in America,” it was not at all clear that black Montgomerians enjoyed this “cosmic companionship”—or that the bus boycott would really reach the national historical proportions that King supposed (King “Annual Address Delivered at Institute on Nonviolence and Social Change Monday,”; “Address at 47<sup>th</sup> NAACP Convention”). But the rhetorical work of the address helped create conditions for the boycott to be taken up in this way.

Indeed, King’s evidence for the “eventness” of the boycott was from the start the existence of a unified black community—which at times seemed to be local to Montgomery, at times national and trans-historical—that had not yet fully come into being. This community, in the process of being constituted through King’s rhetorical hailing, was in the following weeks and months presented as further evidence of the existence of a “brand new Negro” with a new “evaluation of himself” (King “Address at 47<sup>th</sup> NAACP Convention”). Within this framework, the boycott manifested a new agentive black subjectivity that *had already been created*. This “new Negro,” was substantially different from her ancestors in that she understood herself as “somebody” with dignity, because her religious upbringing allowed her to see that she too was a child of God. As Anthony Pinn points out, King’s theory of the emergent sense of dignity of the black subject, known as his philosophy of “somebodiness,” offered “a new perception of the body’s meaning and historical placement” by mobilizing the significance of the human person as “the Imago Dei” (Pinn 59). This move

bears both theological and existential significance in that it suggests an alternate placement of black bodies in time and space—a rethinking of the dual nature of the body—as symbol and as biochemical reality. The body takes on a new meaning, a new value, a new importance that trumps troubled historical relations. (Pinn 59)

“Somebodiness” functioned in this sense as a form of self-respect based in one’s respect for the divine in whose image one was made—a form of honoring one’s ontological relationship with the Creator that obligated a newfound political presence in the world He had made. The collective action of the boycott served as evidence of this sombodiness, since such engagement would require people exhibiting such dignity as its precondition. Affirmation of one’s sombodiness was the “proper response to moral evil,” according to King, who understood moral evil “as the warping of humanity” into states of abjection (Pinn 60). Essentially advocating a movement inverse to Day’s, King’s somebodiness was a repersonalization of the human being in response to the damaged caused by institutions like racism, and it would be “followed in time by felt and functional shifts in sociopolitical and economic reality” (Ibid. 60).

While rhetorically maintaining that this reconstituted black subject had already come into being, King and the leaders of the Montgomery movement were also providing means for its *creation* by stressing “individual moral action as [a] religious ceremony and public performance” with political import (Kosek 193). In speeches, articles, and other public addresses throughout the course of the boycott, King grew increasingly attentive to personal responsibility and “education” as the building blocks of the emerging movement. King argued that the end to segregation would require significant advances in both legislation and education. Both avenues to change had different values: through the law, “[w]e are not seeking so much to change attitudes” as “to control behavior. We are not so much seeking to change one’s internal feelings, but to control the external effects of those internal feelings”—but institutional gains like the recently passed *Brown vs. Board of Education* ruling were not enough (King “Desegregation and the Future”). “We must continue the struggle through legislation... We must continue to gain the ballot... Also we must depend on the growing group of white liberals... But in the final analysis,

the problem of obtaining full equality is a problem for which the Negro himself must assume the primary responsibility” (King “Address at 47<sup>th</sup> NAACP Convention”). This responsibility was manifested as self-criticism, accountability, and turning the other cheek. Education, then, was not spreading awareness about the evils of segregation or investing in the academic futures of blacks. In this sense, King’s vision of education eschewed most progressive liberal understandings of the term, since it indexed not teaching the mind but training the soul.

Indeed, King advocated a set of guiding principles and practices, not cleanly separable from Christian values, that entailed internal transformation: courage and fortitude; the hard work, suffering, self-disciplining, and sacrifice tied to nonviolence and *agape* (King “Realistic Look at Race Relations”). Since the project of nonviolent protest “might even mean going to jail,” boycotters needed to “be willing to fill up the jailhouses of the South”; they needed to be prepared to sacrifice even life itself, because protest “might even mean physical death” (King “Desegregation and the Future”). In this sense, King’s edifying project moved outside of progressive frameworks to valorize suffering and forbearance as personally transformative and maintained the personal as political by recognizing racism to pervade all aspects of life. Religious faith provided the motivation and spiritual sustenance for this process.

As his complicated relationship to education reveals, King’s personalist position attempted to find a stance position between liberal idealism and a realism that maintained the status quo by holding up suffering as a form of transformative spiritual training and nonviolence as an efficacious political methodology. From his very first Holt Street address, King underscored that the boycott was not motivated by a naïve faith but a tempering of love with calculation: “I want to tell you this evening that it is not enough for us to talk about love, love is one of the pivotal points of the Christian face, faith. There is another side called justice. And

justice is really love in calculation. Justice is love correcting that which revolts against love” (King “Holt Street Address”). Introducing the concept of love, which over the course of the boycott he would elaborate as *agape*, King anticipated skepticism of the boycott’s uncompromising Christian terms as idealistic by working to produce discursive space for a transformative and yet “realistic look at race relations” that insisted gradual change was not an option.<sup>24</sup> “[W]e have come a long long way,” King declared, and “we have a long long way to go” (King “A Realistic Look at Race Relations”). Radical optimism and pragmatic pessimism were merely inhibitors to this process.

Locating nonviolent resistance, disciplined education, and taxing but redemptive love at the intersection of political symbolism and private choice, religious ritual and public life, King and the MIA leadership turned to the practice of acting out “theoretical scenes of violence” to prepare boycotters for the charged and dangerous settings that *agape* might mean encountering. Organized with the help of FOR, these training sessions were imagined to help boycotters learn how to respond to hostility with love and restraint, by providing the opportunity to “rehearse how to react so that they could channel violent reactions into nonviolent ones and maintain the movement as a moral exemplar” (Kosek 217). In this sense, the repeated performance of inscribing nonviolence onto the body until it became natural, an internalization technique itself modelled off religious ritual, hoped to accustom the protestors to the practice of *agape* while concomitantly shaping the symbolic value of the boycott. After just a few weeks, FOR and WRL had identified the potential significance of the boycott, quickly dispatching “pacifist emissaries” to the scene (Tracy 91). The work of those FOR members who came to assist with the boycott in

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<sup>24</sup> In a similar manner, early in the boycott King reframed the concept of peace, disarticulating it from association with the idyllic through insistence that peace signified “not merely the absence of . . . tension, but the presence of justice,” and thus would likely entail hardship or even conflict (King “When Peace becomes Obnoxious”).

Montgomery, including Rustin, became instrumental in crafting its public image (Kosek 214). Concerned that, despite his early and immediate introduction of the concept of nonviolence into the rhetoric of the boycott, King's rejection of violence was pragmatic not absolute, FOR quickly dispatched members Rustin and then Glenn Smiley to counsel King and cement his commitment to Christian nonviolence.<sup>25</sup> Their concern was not unjustified: it was arguably the political efficacy of nonviolence's symbolic power, for both its practitioners and it's the boycott's observers, that facilitated King's embrace of it (Tracy 92, 94).

The article on nonviolence King published in *Liberation*, ghostwritten by Rustin, in fact emphasized its strategic value in situations of racial injustice, underscoring the importance of preparing people to take up the challenge of nonviolence:

it is necessary that the mass-action method be persistent and unyielding...It needs the bold and the brave because it is not free of danger...It requires dedicated people, because it is a back-breaking task to arouse, to organize, and to educate tens of thousands for disciplined, sustained action. From this form of struggle more emerges that is permanent and damaging to the enemy than from a few acts of organized violence. (Goodman 284-5)

Acting out scenes of violence in which participants could practice turning the other cheek, hardening themselves to the experience of harassment, and acting out non-retaliation was a means of educating people "for disciplined, sustained action" (ibid.). The article points to the ways in which King's personalist approach was understood by many as able to constitute a mass politics. In fact, after the boycott ended successfully, FOR circulated a comic book about "Martin Luther King and the Montgomery Story" that encouraged replication the rehearsals of theoretical violence and personal practices faith in Montgomery as a way to reproduce the

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<sup>25</sup> FOR was quick to recognize the possible significance of the Montgomery bus boycott, and worried that Rustin's ambiguous sexual history would derail the movement; they sent the white Methodist minister Smiley to replace him (Tracy 89).

boycott's results in other locales: the forms of self-disciplining King advocated became the "Montgomery Method" (FOR comic). The FOR comic's attempt to scale-up the Montgomery boycott was also reinforced by its narrative of the event: intended for a primarily black readership, it nonetheless framed the collaboration between blacks and whites as central to both King's worldview and the success of the protest, indexing an anxiety surrounding the end of the boycott that distrust of white collaborators within the black community might limit the possibility of civil rights initiatives. The comic moreover staged King's nonviolent response to the bombing of his home in the early days of the boycott as pivotal to development of the conflict into larger a movement, framing King's Christ-like living out of nonviolence as providing "hope for all of us" (FOR comic).

Notably, the comic attempted to recreate the form of subject constitution at the heart of King's work in Montgomery in mass form, intimating that a new, better person could be created by following the methods outlined in the text's pages, which concluded with a step-by-step guide for reproducing Montgomery's success. One panel, for instance, detailing the second step of the Montgomery "method," encourages readers to use God's love to identify with the "enemy": "God loves your *enemy* too, and that makes *him* important to you. You have to see *him* as a human being like yourself. You have to try to *understand* him and *sympathize* with him" (FOR comic, emphasis in original). This caption accompanies the image of a black man encountering a white man when he looks in the mirror. Attempting to demonstrate how the practice of sympathy and understanding—terms much different than King's dispassionate *agape*—would allow one to see the other as like the self, the image presumably intends to illustrate spiritual brotherhood through minimizing difference. In this sense, FOR employed a liberal idiom to mobilize King's

work, recontextualizing his terminology within the very progressive paradigm of which he was skeptical.

The rhetorical work of the panel moreover encourages the black man to see himself as a white one, a re-visioning of self also attached to visualizing agency, coded as white. The image in this sense envisions the assertion of autonomy as physically embodying values that were in many ways racialized, encouraging its black readers to help their enemies see them as equals who, as a panel on the following page stated, wanted “the *same kind of things*” they did: “love, a family, a job, the respect of his neighbors” (FOR comic). Bourgeois values were thus maintained as what the comic’s black audience *already* cherished and used to establish a sense of commonality across race. In this sense, just as King’s words often hailed a black community that had not yet come into being, the FOR comic that disseminated King’s story worked to consolidate a black bourgeois sensibility not quite synonymous with the Christian one that King himself advanced by means of a progressive visual and verbal language of equivalence between oppressor and oppressed at odds with some of King’s approach. King’s vision was often read similarly by the liberal media during and immediately after the boycott. As a PhD with a well-bred background, King was quickly hailed by mainstream magazines like *Time* as “humble, articulate, and of high educational attainment...in fact, what many a Negro—and, were it not for his color, many a white—would like to be” (*Time* “Attack on the Conscience”). *Time* in fact placed King on the cover in February of 1957, two months after the boycott ended in success, and profiled him extensively in an article titled “Attack on the Conscience.” King was presented to readers as a picture of the traditionally “good Negro”: an honorable, liberal, “restrained” race reformer who posed no threat to middle-class stability. This type of press essentially underscored that while King was an activist, he was importantly also nonviolent and non-communist:

No radical, he avoids the excesses of radicalism, e.g., he recognized economic reprisal as a weapon that could get out of hand, kept the Montgomery boycott focused on the immediate goal of bus integration, restrained his followers from declaring sanctions against any white merchant or tradesman who offended them. (“Attack on the Conscience”)

The racial subtext of the *Time* article’s positive portrait of King stressed his political competence and distanced him from forms of black religion like emotionalism that were foreign to bourgeois middle-class readers. King was “an expert organizer” and, “brought up in the church,” wondered “whether religion, with its emotionalism in Negro churches, could be intellectually respectable as well as emotionally satisfying” (“Attack on the Conscience”). Like the FOR comic, such narratives elided the forms of radical disciplining, suffering, and transformation that King envisioned with aspects of his life and work that were amenable to the U.S. moral consensus, mobilizing the cross-references to liberal principles, bourgeoisism, and political efficacy in his thought but minimizing the centrality of suffering and sacrifice.

Much of King’s own account of the boycott, the 1958 autobiographical *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story*, which like *Time* article was intended for a wide national (and white) audience, corroborates this image of himself as a liberal reformer who presented as bourgeois in terms of values and personal characteristics. For many, there was much to advocate a black man who, as King did in the autobiography, encouraged his peer to “lift himself up by his own bootstraps” (King *Stride* 218). Yet *Stride* also illuminates the radical ways that King and the black Montgomery community “grapple[d] with a new approach to the crisis in race relations” in attempt to rethink divine obligation as a practical politics (76). “Christ furnished the spirit and motivation [in Montgomery],” King wrote, “while Gandhi furnished the method” (72). Profiling King’s long “pilgrimage” toward the hard work of nonviolence, *Stride* also chronicles a similar process for the greater Montgomery black community, and even includes a copy of the pamphlet

of “suggestions” that MIA and FOR distributed to help the community prepare for the continued suffering they could expect after bus integration went into effect (King *Stride* 85, 157).

Integration, the pamphlet argues, “places upon us all a tremendous responsibility of maintaining, in face of what could be some unpleasantness, a calm and loving dignity befitting good citizens and members of our race” (157). Prayer was framed as an important tool for this project: pamphlet readers were encouraged to “[p]ray for guidance and commit yourself to complete nonviolence in word and action as you enter the bus” (158). They should “[b]e quiet but friendly; proud, but not arrogant; joyous, but not boisterous,” and uphold bourgeois forms of common courtesy and “good behavior,” including composure, non-retaliation, and emotional restraint (157). Perhaps most challengingly, the pamphlet argued for continued commitment to nonretaliation and sacrifice; should they witness a peer abused in some way, they should not “arise to his defense, but pray for the oppressor and use moral and spiritual force to carry on the struggle for justice” (158). Readers were kindly asked to “read, study, and memorize [these suggestions] so that our nonviolent determination may not be endangered” (157).

Presenting nonviolence as the “ultimate form of persuasion,” *Stride* made the case for a form of personal politics that worked from the inside out: the oppressor’s conscience would convince her of the error of her own ways, while the black subject’s moral strength would convince her of her own somebodiness (King *Stride* 211).

The nonviolent approach does not immediately change the heart of the oppressor. It first does something to the hearts and souls of those committed to it. It gives them new self-respect; it calls up resources of strength and courage that they did not know they had. Finally it reaches the opponent and so stirs his conscience that reconciliation becomes a reality. I suggest this approach because I think it is the only way to reestablish the broken community. Court orders and federal enforcement agencies will be of inestimable value in achieving desegregation. But desegregation is only a partial, though necessary, step toward the ultimate goal which we seek to realize. Desegregation will break down the legal barriers, and bring men together physically. But something must happen so to touch the hearts and souls of men that they will come together, not because the law says it, but

because it is natural and right. In other words, our ultimate goal is integration which is genuine intergroup and interpersonal living. Only through nonviolence can this goal be attained, for the aftermath of nonviolence is reconciliation and the creation of the beloved community. (215)

The “creation of the beloved community,” a manifestation of “genuine intergroup and interpersonal living,” was thus a direct consequence of the transformative power of *agape*, demanding sacrifice of even the desire for retribution. Though King was rigorous in *Stride Toward Freedom* in outlining the policy changes necessary for racial justice to occur in America, he ultimately founded transformation of “hearts and minds” in the form of personalization at stake in the process of cultivating “somebodiness.” Only by embracing and embodying their God-given human dignity could black Americans help constitute the form of integration that was “the only way to reestablish the broken community” (215). For King, the “ultimate triumph of God's will in human history [would be] known through the placement of these reconstituted bodies in the ‘beloved community’” (Pinn 60).

The Beloved Community thus emerged as the perfect union of divine and democratic citizenship: “an eschatological reality, God's own future arriving ahead of time in our present, remaking our hostility-filled” world (Simpson 60). And King identified it as his duty to bind this vision “to America and the world” (60). “The Negro may be God’s appeal to this age,” King wrote in the conclusion to *Stride*, “an age drifting rapidly to its doom. [His] eternal appeal takes the form of a warning: ‘All who take the sword will perish by the sword’” (*Stride* 221). By taking up Christ’s call to nonviolence, King argued that the Montgomery boycotters were taking up their spiritual responsibility in helping to usher in the Kingdom of God, bring the Beloved Community into being by enacting their divine personhood.

## **The Personal Politics of Spiritual Community**

Day and King advanced distinct and in some ways inverted personalist politics that were nonetheless similarly premised in an embrace of love and suffering that found its call and provision in the divine. Day's was a personal politics of the little way, which located religious subjectivity in the small, everyday sacrifices, imitations of the divine, and expressions of faith in the simplicity of a life pared down to the essential. King instead reframed individual acts of racial protest into declarations of political and spiritual personhood. His personalist politics worked to transform discrimination into a resource for belonging by consolidating an agentive black subjectivity using a religious idiom of suffering and sacrifice. Because the person was created by and in the likeness of the divine, both Day and King identified a moral responsibility to materially manifest one's personhood through the demanding work of loving the other. For both, this process facilitated a form of intimacy with God that enabled spiritual fellowship by extending one's relationship with the divine toward others. God became the spiritual glue capable of binding together a society broken by cultures of poverty and racism: the Beloved Community and the Mystical Body of Christ, which proffered the transformative and redemptive power of divine love as a site of social cohesion, framed spiritual unity as a political ideal. Traversing the era's cold war cultural politics and religious revivalism, Day's and King's personalism thus disciplined idealism and personalized religious nationalism in attempt to assuage what Day called the "long loneliness" and to "reestablish" what King called "the broken community" through communion with the transcendent personality of the divine.

## Chapter Three.

### Carl Rogers, Wellfleet Psychohistory, and the 1960s Politics of Personality

While some were looking to religion to find meaning in the postwar world, others were looking to psychology. In this chapter, I turn to the ways the personal was taken up within the rapidly expanding field of psychology, which was deinstitutionalized in the postwar years and intensely pluralized across the long 1960s, expanding widely into vernacular discourse. Indeed, from 1945 to 1970, professional membership for psychiatrists grew exponentially, institutional care was replaced by the rise of private and community health clinics, and clinical psychology underwent a process of professionalization that included the foundation of a range of new training programs (Herman 259). The mid-twentieth century's rapid deinstitutionalization of psychiatry meant the field grew to encompass not only individuals who were subject to mental illness but also those who had previously been considered "normal" or "high-functioning." Yet this de-pathologizing of mental health also unfolded in conjunction with a "newly medicalized approach to diagnosis" offered by mid-century psychologists, which "was a product of their success in aligning themselves with natural scientists" (Grogan 5). This disciplinary change pivoted in part on the role psychiatry played in the armed forces during the Second World War and on the postwar challenge of preparing veterans to return to civilian life; it also dovetailed with the uptake of psychology in the worlds of business and advertising as a means of improving organizational efficiency and reaching consumers. As therapy, which had previously been limited to cosmopolitan elites, was experienced by more and more individuals across the postwar period, it became an element of mass culture fascination that was increasingly integrated into high school and college curriculums and part of everyday conversation (Herman 261).

This process unfolded hand-in-hand with the expansion of state services supporting education and research in psychology. In 1946 the National Mental Health Act dramatically increased the funding available for U.S. psychological research; in 1955, the Joint Commission of Mental Health and Illness was established to bring together various experts and organizations working in mental health, and it soon after inaugurated an extensive national study on American mental health. As Ellen Herman points out, this study's findings maintained "the fundamental equation between democracy and mental health that had been a constant refrain during and after World War Two" (Herman 252). Joseph Veroff's *The Inner American: A Self Portrait from 1957 to 1976*, just one of ten monographs resulting from this decades-long research, framed the study's very existence a testament to changed attitudes towards psychology in the country:

Between 1957 and 1976, our culture underwent what can reasonably be described as a psychological revolution. The establishment of the joint commission which sponsored *Americans View Their Mental Health* was in itself a signal and symptom of the shift toward a psychological orientation in our culture. A congressional commission took on itself the task of assessing the psychological health and well-being of the American people! This act as well as the programs and policies launched in the wake of the commission's extensive series of studies and reports revealed, among other findings, a faith in mental-health services. (Veroff 14)

The "psychological revolution" that the study traced meant that, from 1957 to 1976, U.S. citizens grew "more likely to frame their satisfactions, problems, and inadequacies in psychological and relational terms...The psychological and interpersonal orientation, which was almost exclusively a characteristic of the highly educated in 1957, had become common coin by 1976" (Ibid. 25).

This cultural spreading of a "psychological and interpersonal orientation" occurred largely outside of, but was nonetheless influenced by, the proliferation of competing approaches to mental health shaking the discipline: a continually growing interest in psychoanalysis; the emergence of its competitor: scientific radical behaviorism; new forms of existential, phenomenological, and humanistic psychology; and Neo-Freudian developmental or ego

psychology. These different approaches, making use of different methodologies and idioms, diverged first and foremost in how they viewed the person. Classic Freudian psychotherapists, for instance, saw human beings as fundamentally conflicted, immoral, and motivated by drives that needed to be repressed, while neo-Freudians like Erik Erikson, Erich Fromm, and Karen Horney repurposed Freud's concept of the ego to identify a more perfectible human being who was strongly influenced by the society in which she lived. The radical behaviorism that grew up around B. F. Skinner found human beings even more fundamentally shaped by, even passive to, deterministic external forces that conditioned their behavior; his approach granted little weight to subjective interior experience. The humanistic tradition instituted by Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow, and Rollo May rejected behaviorism as reductive of human autonomy and instead outlined a self-actualizing model of the self; their work often resonated with that of existential psychologists like R.D. Laing, Viktor Frankl, and Franz Perls, who focused on the person's ability to become better in tune with itself, its feelings, and its desire for meaning.

These varying accounts of the psychological subject—"a generation's postwar testimony through psychology"—indexed heightened concern for the repercussions of recent historical events on models for thinking the self and thus were deeply entwined with postwar politics.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, such debates over the ontology of the person were part of a politics of personality that was rooted in psychology but bridged the discipline with theology, history, and above all, sociology. While I have been tracing the rise of the social as a political register throughout this dissertation, in this chapter, that process plays out in the interdisciplinary merging of sociology and psychology, a phenomenon advanced by the rise of what Arthur J. Schlesinger referred to as "qualitative liberalism" within U.S. social science. Unlike the quantitative liberalism

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<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Lauren Berlant for this apt framing of the phenomenon.

characterizing the U.S. 1930s and the postwar politics of abundance, which emphasized economic growth, Schlesinger advocated a qualitative liberalism that instead focused on quality of life and the forms of sociality characterizing the U.S.' postwar changed economic, political, and social landscape (Schlesinger "The Future of Liberalism" 8-9, Geary 605).<sup>2</sup> Whereas quantitative liberalism, advanced by postwar figures like economist Leon Keyserling, focused on maximizing economic growth as quickly as possible and dovetailed during the 1950s with the ethos of restraint at the heart of early postwar liberalism, qualitative liberalism—whose major proponent could instead be identified as John Kenneth Galbraith, economist of *The Affluent Society* fame—instead took economic growth for granted and asked what *kind* of growth the country wanted (Collins 49).<sup>3</sup>

The shift toward qualitative liberalism was framed by Schlesinger as response to the "spiritual malaise" generated by an "economy of abundance"; he called upon the new liberalism "to identify the sources of discontent and to develop a program and a philosophy capable of meeting the challenge of the new era" by addressing questions about "the *quality* of civilization" raised by the era's rise of mass culture and materialism (Schlesinger 9, Collins 62).

There still are pools of poverty which have to be mopped up; but the central problem will be increasingly that of fighting for individual dignity, identity, and fulfillment in an affluent mass society. The issues of the new period will not be those involved with refueling the economic machine, putting floors under wages, and farm prices, establishing systems of social security. The new issues will be rather those of education, health, equal opportunity, community planning -- the issues which make the difference between defeat and opportunity, between frustration and fulfillment, in the everyday lives of average persons. These issues will determine the quality of civilization to which our

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<sup>2</sup> This was witnessed also in the political priorities of the liberals in government: "In the 1930s and 1940s, liberals had controlled the reins of national government and had stressed government as the main instrumentality of collective action. When liberals returned again to state power after 1960, this emphasis on government action received fresh impetus, and a fissure opened between older liberals in positions of power and younger activists who fixed their moral gaze on the character and actions of individuals" (Rossinow 49).

<sup>3</sup> Keyserling was interested in growth as a way of expanding economic opportunity. He argued that "expanded production for private consumption was indeed needed in order to liquidate the large pockets of poverty still existing in American society" (Collins 49). Galbraith's *The Affluent Society* described the disparity between public and private wealth in the United States and argued for a strengthened welfare state.

nation aspires in an age of ever-increasing wealth and leisure. (Schlesinger, “The New Mood in Politics”)

This paradigm of qualitative liberal thinking, which took postwar growth as a given, functioned both in and outside of the academy and also influenced the Democratic party, informing Kennedy's leveraging of economic growth to fund social programs and Johnson's Great Society, a program that was framed as a step toward good stewardship of the country's wealth (Collins 50-59, Geary 605). In social science research, qualitative liberalism dovetailed with debates over the nature of personality to interrogate the contours of personal experience as it was inhabited by the expanded U.S. middle-class: since the 1930s, U.S. social science had been working to elaborate a “democratic personality” that would stand in opposition to a communistic or fascistic one, mediating between the ostensible threat to individuality posed by expanded bureaucracy and that bureaucracy's role in consolidating a national identity. Frankfurt school critiques like Theodor Adorno's influential *The Authoritarian Personality*, Wilhelm Reich's *Character Analysis*, and Erich Fromm's *Escape From Freedom*, alongside the work of Herbert Marcuse and C. Wright Mills, tied the government organization to the personality of a citizenry and promoted the traits of autonomy, creativity, and open-mindedness as the foundations for democratic social life.<sup>4</sup> The “democratic personality” became synonymous with “a highly individuated, rational, and empathetic mindset, committed to racial and religious diversity, and so able to collaborate with others while retaining its individuality” (Turner 3). This discursive theorizing of the psychological underpinnings of democratic life was reproduced in sociological studies such as *The Organization Man*, *White Collar*, *Eclipse of Community*, and

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<sup>4</sup> See Jamie Cohen-Cole's *The Open Mind: Cold War Politics and the Sciences of Human Nature*, Elizabeth Lunbeck's *The Americanization of Narcissism*, and Jeremy Varon, *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction, and Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and Seventies*.

*The Lonely Crowd*, which interrogated the potential for such “democratic” personalities to flourish in a massified postwar society. It is worth emphasizing the extensive discursive reach of these discussions of personality: in *Brown v. Board of Education*, for instance, the Supreme Court made reference to the authoritarian personality in its ruling, arguing that racism, like other forms of ideology, was inherently damaging the personality development of U.S. citizens—and therefore a threat to democratic life.<sup>5</sup> This democratic personality, with its origins in anxiety over fascism and ideology, “melted almost imperceptibly into the consumer of the 1950s. The World War II effort to challenge totalitarian mass psychology gave rise to a new kind of mass psychology, a mass individualism grounded in the democratic rhetoric of choice and individuality, but practiced in a polity that was already a marketplace” (Turner 6).<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps the keystone text of this nascent qualitative liberalism was David Riesman’s, Nathan Glazer’s, and Reuel Denney’s innovative and immensely popular *The Lonely Crowd*, published in 1950, whose explanatory power resonated considerably beyond academic sociology in its identification of a prevailing new American character type, the “other-directed” person. In its psychological history of the personality precedents to “an age of other-direction,” the text called for new forms of autonomy that would mediate this new personality type’s heightened sensitivity to influence by other people, which at its most extreme “threatened to stamp out

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<sup>5</sup> Thank you to Adrienne Brown for drawing my attention to this point. See Herman, *The Romance of American Psychology and Race, Culture, and the Intellectuals, 1940–1970* by Richard H. King.

<sup>6</sup> Turner provides an account of the origins of this project: “In 1941, more than fifty of America’s leading social scientists and journalists gathered in Manhattan to promulgate a democratic alternative to that personality as members of the newly formed Committee for National Morale. Though largely forgotten today, the committee was very influential in its time. Its members published widely in the popular press and advised numerous government officials, including President Roosevelt. Across the 1930s, committee members such as anthropologists Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson and psychologist Gordon Allport had worked to show how culture shaped the development of the psyche, particularly through the process of interpersonal communication. In the early years of the war, they turned those understandings into prescriptions for bolstering American morale... Second, they argued that the future of America’s war effort depended on sustaining that form of character and the voluntary, non-authoritarian unity it made possible” (Turner 2-3).

marks of individuality” (Geary 610). *The Lonely Crowd*’s arguments were underpinned by distrust of the “false personalization” inherent to the managerial ethos of organizational culture, the manner in which the social glue provided by this culture “the boundaries between the personal and political” and allowed “inauthentic emotions [to] dominate public life” (McClay 236-7, McLaughlin 14). Such forced personalism—by which Riesman and his colleagues meant inauthentic, compulsory performances of sociability—coerced individuals to assume an affable demeanor in the workplace and to engage in forms of forced relatedness like teamwork that only “left individuals disconnected from one another,” sapping the limited emotional and psychological resources they had for investing in themselves and relations with others (Geary 610, Lunn 67). Through “false personalization,” bureaucracy thus attempted to exploit and repurpose the resources of personal life for the needs of the organization, without reference to their subjective content—the rise of a new kind affective labor that, according to Riesman, masked its hollowness in the garb of workplace cordiality and company picnics.

The psychologists I take up in this chapter, Carl Rogers and the Wellfleet Psychohistorians Kenneth Keniston and Robert J. Lifton, like Riesman were skeptical of the bureaucratic culture they saw characterizing postwar mass society and optimistic about personality traits like flexibility and creativity that were strongly marked as democratic by the cultural politics of the Cold War. They advanced a model of the psychological subject as a self-in-process that in many ways aligned with the aspirations of liberal participatory democracy by framing high-functioning, fully developed personhood as something that looked a lot like ideal Cold War citizenship. But this participation in a general culture of qualitative liberalism should not obscure the more personalist interventions Rogers, Keniston, and Lifton made into the field of U.S. social science—by asking what it might mean to consider psychological experience a

shared space whose mutuality was a resource, not a threat (Lunn 84, Geary 609). Working within an ethos committed to managing the influence of the social on the personality by encouraging independence and uniqueness, these psychologists advanced personalist models of psychological personhood within a discursive world inclined to answer the postwar crisis of massification with individualism and agency panic. Motivated by the same concerns echoing across the dissertation about a postwar crisis of experience, they situated their responses to that dilemma within a personalist paradigm that rejected mid-century U.S. social science's emphasis on scientific knowledge, objective detachment, individual adjustment, and the dualism of the individual-collective model of social life (Abbott and Sparrow 301). Responding to the period's relativism of ethics and pluralization of lifestyles and values with "broken world" concern over the loss of "faith [in] previous moral evaluations" and of "traditional ways of viewing the world" (which could not, they argued, simply be reduced to "the recurrence of perennial generational conflict") they framed what they saw as the period's "increasing concern about, interest in, and a searching for, a sound or meaningful value approach which can hold its own in today's world" in the ways the psychological was both biologically universal and personally particular (Keniston "Psychological Development" 345, Rogers "Values" 13). What the crisis of experience discourse expressed as a loss was taken up in their work as evidence of and opportunity for psychic health, making the social transformations of the postwar world a condition of its possibility and promise.

Rogers, a clinical psychologist, made reference to different psychological idioms and methodologies than Keniston and Lifton. As a founder of the humanistic branch of psychology, imagined as a "third force" in a psychological field organized by Freudian psychoanalysis and Skinnerian behaviorism, Rogers also pioneered the "person-centered" approach to therapy—a "non-directive" method intended to equalize and personalize the relationship between client and

therapist. These vehicles help Rogers to facilitate the postwar spread of clinical psychology as a practice distinct from psychoanalysis and institutional psychiatry (Zaretsky 280-81). Roger's new clinical approach not only dramatically up-ended the therapeutic relationship, it also situated the concepts of self and personality growth in a process of social interaction, placing self-actualization within a relational paradigm. This undermining of the model of the sovereign, monadic subject ascribed psychological health to an ongoing process that was dependent on others. Moreover, Rogers's extension of his therapeutic model to other "helping" professions engaged in affective labor and to interpersonal relationships more generally advanced his belief that one did not need to be self-actualized in order to be a relational resource: even those who experienced themselves as psychologically disorganized could be there for others in meaningful ways. Participating in a positive relationship would itself facilitate self-growth.

The relational foundations of this model set Rogers apart from many other humanistically minded therapists—and is also often forgotten in accounts of humanistic or 1960s psychology more generally, which tend to emphasize the period's emphasis on self-actualization and supposed 'culture of narcissism.' Yet Roger's work notably rendered the personal political by considering psychic repair a sort of shared interpersonal endeavor with the capacity to facilitate transformation of the parties involved through expressions of acceptance and empathy. The distinctiveness of Rogers's framing of the healthy self as a continual process of relationally constituted change cannot be overemphasized in a period of pluralizing accounts of the self—many of which also emphasized self-growth but lacked the relational emphasis of Rogers's model.

Wellfleet Psychohistorians Keniston and Lifton also considered healthy personhood a process: a form of adaptability that emerged in relation to "historical change in the

developmental matrix” (Keniston “Psychological Development and Historical Change” 344). Their reframing of the therapeutic encounter as a historically embedded process manifested as academic studies composed of comprehensive interviews that engaged the point of contact between the collective conditions of existence, the individual psyche, and historical change by tracing the overlap between adult personality growth and structural political transformations. By tracing the symbolic patterns and shared imaginaries at the intersect of individual and ethos, which they argued pivoted on conceptualizations of time, Keniston and Lifton took up a developmental model of personality based in Erik Erikson’s ego psychology to articulate a version of subjectivity in which the personal was political because it was psychically shared.

Keniston and Lifton theorized the postwar crisis of experience as a breakdown in psychic experiences of continuity between past and future—a disruption of the relays usually providing a coherence collective goals for the future, representations of the past, and values in the present caused by the dramatic scale of the Second World War’s violence and the advent of nuclear weapons (Lifton “On Psychohistory” 38). Both scholars looked to the young radical activists of the 1960s as case studies for elaborating the political and moral implications of the personality transformations they saw attending the postwar’s historical dislocations, situating these figures within a personalist explanatory paradigm that accounted for youth culture and collective radical action as indication of the emergence of a new personality type attentive sensitive to personalist concerns. In this sense, their work elaborated the historical conditions for the emergence of the personal as a shared psychic desire.

## Humanistic Psychology: Carl Rogers on “Becoming a Person”

Humanistic psychology emerged in the late 1950s as a form of collaboration between Rogers, Abraham Maslow, Rollo May, and other members of the American Psychology Association (APA) (“History of Division 32” 88).<sup>7</sup> “[R]esurrecting a dialogue that went back to the beginnings of psychology in America and the work of William James, humanistic psychologists breathed some life back into a discipline that [they believed] had moved too far toward scientism and the medical model and that had strayed too far from its philosophical and theological roots in the fundamentals of human existence” (Grogan x). As the American Psychological Association’s history of the division points out,

many isolated voices began to gather momentum and form a critique of American culture and consciousness and to form the basis of a new approach to psychology... [as] adjustment models were challenged by visions of growth, and the human potential movement emerged. T-groups, sensitivity training, human relations training, and encounter groups became popular. The goal was greater awareness of one’s own actual experience in the moment and authentic engagement with others, goals not well-served by academic psychology, clinical psychology, or the culture in general. Growth centers sprang up across the country, offering a profusion of workshops and techniques, such as transactional analysis, sensory awareness, gestalt encounter, body work, meditation, yoga, massage therapy, and psychosynthesis. The best known of these was Esalen Institute, founded in Big Sur, California, in 1964. (“History of Division 32” 87).

*The Journal of Humanistic Psychology* was launched in 1961 with an editorial board that, in addition to Rogers and May, included Erich Fromm, Aldous Huxley, and Riesman. The division imagined itself as a “third force” in the field of psychology, offering an alternative to the biological and deterministic underpinnings of behaviorism and Freudian psychoanalysis. Skeptical of the behavioral sciences’ general tendency to consider human beings as objects determined by forces like the unconscious or external stimuli that precluded the possibility of

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<sup>7</sup> Maslow is well-known for developing the hierarchy of needs. “He argued that people are motivated not only reactively by the ‘deficiency needs’ with which psychology had hitherto been concerned, but also proactively by ‘being needs,’ ultimately including such motives as self-actualization” (“A History of Division 32,” 86).

individual choice or change, humanistic psychology attempted to re-personalize the psychological subject. It deemed the behaviorist paradigm dominating U.S. departments of psychology unwilling to differentiate “subjective state apart from [the] various external circumstances” that were theorized to condition them, while the Freudian paradigm was considered too focused on destructive, irrational drives that obscured a more holistic person capable of rational choice (Rogers “A Theory of Therapy” 191).<sup>8</sup>

Quickly growing to encompass many methods and philosophies—including gestalt, body work, psychosynthesis, encounter groups, sensitivity training, person-centered counseling, and marital and family therapies—the field was united by its belief that the human being was self-determined and self-actualizing. It took up “themes such as the nature of the self, self-actualization, health, creativity, being, becoming, individuation, and meaning,” promoting a model of the human being as fundamentally inclined toward growth and autonomy (“History of Division 108” 88). And as a wide-ranging and inclusive subfield, it was also hospitable to phenomenological and existential clinical approaches. The proliferation and unequally scientific bases for these approaches meant that humanistic psychology was often met with skepticism by institutional psychology. Indeed, many practitioners, regarded as outsiders in the field, left academic and professional institutions for private research institutes. Yet their cultural influence was enormous in the 1960s and early 1970s. Indeed, when Skinner, a major opponent to the humanistic methodology,

nearing the end of his long career, contemplated the question of why psychology had not become a science of behavior, as he phrased it, he posited three formidable obstacles on that path (Skinner, 1987). He proclaimed the number one obstacle had been humanistic

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<sup>8</sup> Rogers explained in a dialogue with philosopher of science Karl Polanyi: “I’m concerned that the behavioral sciences are tending to depersonalize the individual and often tending to cause people to feel they are themselves robots, rather than individuals with spontaneity and possibility of responsible action and so on” (Rogers “Dialogue with Polanyi”, 156).

psychology; the other two were cognitivism and psychotherapy. (“History of Division 32” 98)

The power that Skinner attributed to the division, however, largely played out outside of psychology's gatekeeping institutions; above all, humanistic psychology had popular purchase.

While many of the figures operating within the constellation of humanistic psychology worked to rescue the subject from determinism and scientism by emphasizing the self's possibility for change and growth, Roger's theory was unique in its insistence that this happened within a relational paradigm that subverted the Cartesian monadic subject. By the early 1960s he was becoming well-known. His 1961 book, *On Becoming a Person*, a text compiling selected papers written over the course of the preceding decade, cohesively introduced many to Rogers's innovative therapeutic model, which was first termed non-directive, then client-centered, and finally person-centered—a terminology change premised in shifting away from the medical model, in which those undergoing therapy were “patients,” that also marked Rogers's continual reframing of the psychological subject.<sup>9</sup> The move from “client” to “person,” for instance, underscored Roger's emphasis on the therapeutic relationship as equalizing and meaningful for both participants. He argued that the “social sciences today can do things for people, but they also do things to people” (Rogers “Dialogue with Polanyi” 156).

Over the decades, Rogers's person-centered approach and non-directive method have come to impact a number of fields, including social work and counseling. Yet when it was first developed, it was considered both controversial and threatening, since its non-direction sidestepped the forms of intervention traditionally typical of the therapist and thus undermined the therapist's customary task of providing advice, suggestion, or judgement: the non-directive

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<sup>9</sup> Rogers was culturally known before the publication of this book. For instance, his theory had already been featured in a *Time* magazine article entitled “Medicine: Person to Person” in 1957.

therapist did not offer explanations but instead helped the client move toward acknowledging and accepting her feelings by creating the conditions for a warm, supportive relationship in which she would want to share herself. Always maintaining the self-worth of the client, Rogers identified three conditions as necessary and sufficient to enable personality change and personal growth: 1) the "congruence" of the therapist in the therapeutic relationship, in the sense that the clinician would be authentic in her relationship with the client so there was consistency among how the therapist felt, how she behaved, and what she said; 2) the expression of "unconditional positive regard" for the client, or "a warm acceptance of each aspect of the client's experience," not bound to discriminating conditions or judgements, that was actually felt by the therapist; and 3) "sens[ing] the client's private world as if it were your own," or the feeling and expression of understanding and empathy—a term that Rogers helped to popularize (Rogers "Necessary and Sufficient Conditions of Therapeutic Personality Change" 225-26).<sup>10</sup>

Rogers believed that need for the type of positive recognition produced by this approach was universal and that it enabled the process of integrating how one felt with how one thought of one's self that in turn enabled one to live more fully (Rogers "Necessary and Sufficient Conditions" 223). This approach expressed confidence that human beings were perfectible, rational, and forward-moving, always organismically inclined to move toward greater order and growth—and away from external control toward self-direction. Under proper conditions, the playing out of the "necessary conditions" in the social relation, the person would become more realistic and more social, unable to help but actualize her need for closer human contact

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<sup>10</sup> Rogers also explained these conditions in the following way: "For therapy to occur it is necessary that these conditions exist. 1. That two persons are in contact. 2. That the first person, whom we shall term the client, is in a state of incongruence, being vulnerable, or anxious. 3. That the second person, whom we shall term the therapist, is congruent in the relationship. 4. That the therapist is experiencing unconditional positive regard toward the client. 5. That the therapist is experiencing an empathic understanding of the client's internal frame of reference. 6. That the client perceives, at least to a minimal degree, conditions 4 and 5: the unconditional positive regard of the therapist for him, and the empathic understanding of the therapist" (Rogers "Theory of Therapy" 213).

(Rogers Dialogues 75). Meeting these conditions, the therapist would enable the emergence of a relationship with the client that would be meaningful to both parties and would increase the client's receptivity to experience by helping her to accept denied, repressed, negative feelings; this relationship would moreover be very personal, in that it would be specific to the persons involved and not a generalizable therapist-client relationship. Since people behaved in ways that were consistent with their concepts of self, if they denied awareness of certain aspects of their experience, they would be out of sync, and so would their sense of self and behavior. To change her self-concept, the client needed the recognition and appreciation of others, which would allow her to perceive all of her experience—even its most disavowed, threatening aspects—as acceptable and enable her to fully assimilate it into her self-concept. This process of accepting one's self meant recognizing one's own "incongruence", but importantly Rogers maintained that the therapist herself did need not be a fully congruent person in order to perform her role—what was important was being *congruent in her relationship* with the client (Rogers Dialogues 22). In other words, the therapist needed to be present in the relationship in an honest, real way, so that there was no trace of inauthenticity or hypocrisy in how she engaged with the client as a person.

This type of relationship subverted the neutral therapeutic persona that had been advocated by Freud and the detached direction exercised by the behavioral model. Rogers called for empathetic emotional dexterity would allow the therapist to “voice meanings [rooted] in the clients' experience of which the client is scarcely aware”—to reframe the client's words and feelings to help better identify her own perceptions and meanings in a manner that would help her better acknowledge and understand them (Rogers “Necessary Conditions” 226, 227). This was distinguished from directing the therapeutic conversation or passing judgments. Moreover,

the therapist's transparency regarding her own feelings throughout this process was key as it is what enabled her coherence in the relationship. The concepts of transference and countertransference played no role in this process, as they were considered deterrents in the establishment of a real relationship between the client and the therapist (Rogers *Man and Ideas* 31). Moreover, unlike psychoanalysis, Rogers was uninterested in the factors that "caused" or developed a personality, how a person had come to be how she was or her personal history; instead, he focused exclusively on fostering the conditions that would facilitate personality growth—not some reality hidden in the client's unconscious, but her client's current perceptual experience.

In such ways, Rogers's non-directive method challenged both the typical treatment process, in which the clinician diagnosed the client and actively worked to resolve the identified problem, and the affiliated concept of the clinician as expert. The trust Rogers's model afforded the client and its "absence of explanatory mechanisms" or interpretations on the part of the therapist meant relinquishing belief that the client fundamentally *needed* the therapist or that the clinician knew more than the client, who had the ability to reorganize herself. Rogers's method thus fundamentally shifted the power relationship inherent to the therapeutic encounter, as it maintained therapy should not be imagined as "expert manipulation of a more or less passive personality" but the experience of a warm, genuine relationship premised in unconditional acceptance (Rogers "Theory of Therapy" 220).

To make matters worse, Rogers insisted that this process could be stimulated by any interpersonal relationship that met the necessary conditions for a therapeutic relationship, so long as "the other person is congruent in the relationship, experiences unconditional positive regard toward, and empathetic understanding of the individual, and achieves some communication of

these attitudes to the individual” (Rogers “Theory of Therapy” 217, 220-1). Since all humans had a deep need for this kind of recognition and could only learn to love themselves through such an interpersonal structure, Rogers maintained that the insights he gained in the clinical setting allowed him to theorize a new paradigm for cultivating positive interpersonal relationships more generally. If the ultimate goal of therapy was to enable the person to become more self-integrated, to be more open to experience and to feelings, to foster a richer and more sensitive form of living, this was also the goal of many kinds of helping relationships, and Rogers was quick to extend his model to education, ministry, and social work. These and all other interpersonal relationships were based on the same human needs and premised in the same response to expressions of unconditional positive regard.

Isolating the outlook of Rogers from the May and Maslow, the other founders of humanistic psychology, who all shared the basic premise of a self-actualizing subject, helps to distinguish what was unique about this approach. May, for instance, who was more existentially oriented than Rogers and considered himself in many ways a philosopher, advanced a radically individualistic “ethics of inwardness” that differed from Rogers in its “elevation of the self above society, [in] a retreat from cultural dependence” (Grogan 74). In other words, May advocated a form of self-actualization or realization that was constituted through pulling away from the world, a move which he believed would enable individuals to discover and assert their autonomy or independence and shed the weight of societal conformity. Withdrawal allowed one to focus on the personal rather than continue to be depersonalized by society. Rogers clearly did not support the idea of social withdrawal. He was also less interested in concepts like independence and autonomy than May. As Richard Farson would later write, his goal was

instead to create “a new form, a new definition of relationship in which people can function more fully and be more self-determining” (Rogers *Man and Ideas* xxxix).<sup>11</sup>

Maslow, whose hierarchy of needs and concept of self-actualization became important reference points for the humanistic psychology subfield, was an important influence on Roger’s thinking. Maslow argued that once basic physical and psychological needs were met, “[r]ather than acting in the interest of self-preservation or tension reduction, the healthy, self-actualizing individual would offer creative, generative responses to the difficulties of life” (Grogan 64). He emphasized the need for the self-actualized to be independent of society, not weighted down by norms and expectations; in this sense, he like May responded directly to the threat of other-direction noted by figures like David Riesman (*ibid.* 17).<sup>12</sup> Maslow’s model of the self, however, was essentially homeostatic, premised in the person’s drive toward self-consolidation; it thus did not champion the continued process of evaluation of feelings and situations at the heart of Roger’s model (Rogers *Man and Ideas* 4). Indeed, for Rogers the static nature of the consolidated Maslowian self constituted maladjustment rather than health: “the good life is not any fixed state...It is not a condition in which the individual is adjusted, or fulfilled, or actualized...[it] is a process, not a state of being. It is a direction, not a destination” (Rogers *Man and Ideas* 16, “Therapist’s View of the Good Life” 410-411). The ongoingness of the process of self-integration was key to how Rogers understood the self. For Rogers, “The fully functioning person would be a person-in-process, a person continually changing...adaptive to each new situation, and that the person would be continually in a process of further self-

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<sup>11</sup> Farson, who served as president of the Esalen Institute from 1973 to 1975, was a close collaborator of Rogers’s, working with him beginning in 1949. Among their many joint enterprises was a co-published a paper on “active listening” and the co-facilitation of the group therapy session filmed in the documentary *Journey into Self*.

<sup>12</sup> As outlined in the introduction, David Riesman’s *The Lonely Crowd*, which introduced the terms “other-directed” and “inner-directed,” had a considerable impact on the period’s conception of self and of ideal citizenship.

actualization... Freud's statements that 'groups have never thirsted after truth' and that 'a group is an obedient herd which could never live without a master'" suggesting a very different picture of the human organism (Rogers "Theory of Therapy" 248).

Maslow moreover recognized negative aspects to human nature that Rogers did not; he found Rogers naïve because he had little space for sin, evil, and psychopathology in his theory (Grogan 65). Rogers had been convinced by his clinical work that the human being was not only directed toward growth and improvement but also fundamentally good, because "the basic trustworthiness of human nature" meant the "core of personality was positive" (Rogers *On Becoming a Person* 198, 90). Negative behavior was the result of incongruence and societally produced evil, not human nature. This optimistic view was challenged on a variety of fronts.<sup>13</sup> Freud of course had insisted on violence and destructive drives as fundamental human characteristics, whereas Rogers framed negative impulses as the means by which "defensively-organized" people desperately groped toward "increasing harmony with self and others" (Rogers *Dialogues* 28). But even when performing negative behavior, the person was always moving unidirectionally toward the goal of self-actualization: "the general tendency of the organism to behave in those ways which maintain and enhance itself," which was always a reflection of "a person-in-process, a person continually changing" (Rogers "A Theory of Therapy" 196). These negative behaviors, part of the person's inclination toward self-enhancement, would increasingly fall away as she experienced the base conditions necessary to feel recognized and accepted.

We could also usefully contrast Roger's ideas from those of existential and phenomenological psychologists like R.D. Laing. Laing, who was a major figure in the

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<sup>13</sup> Theologians, for instance, also raised serious doubts. According to the prevailing tenets of mid-century Christian realism, human nature was shaped by the original sin of self-love. As the last chapter discussed, this theological framework was widely elaborated by Reinhold Niebuhr in the period.

antipsychiatry movement, like Rogers critiqued “the prevailing medical model’s reductionistic and pathological view of schizophrenic patients” (“History of Division 32” 87). He precipitated “a revisioning of even psychotic processes as meaningful, growth-seeking experiencing” by upholding the view shared by most humanistic psychologists that the client had the capacity to help herself (Ibid.). Like Rogers, Laing aimed to foster a more authentic encounter between therapist and client via affirmation of the client’s subjective experience, but he was more committed to affirming realities experienced by the client that had traditionally been considered “sick” than in the relationship animating the therapeutic encounter itself; he argued that pathology should be understood as a reasonable response to unreasonable social structures rather than a symptom of illness. Rogers was less focused on the cultural forces producing illness than on personality repair and like Laing wanted to affirm the existing experiential state of the client but with the goal of better self-integration, which Laing did not share.

A swath of other psychologists from the period could be analyzed sharing some features of Rogers's theory and in other ways diverging.<sup>14</sup> But what is more important to emphasize is how Rogers framed the subject as a self in relation that flourished most when it was continually attempting to integrate its feelings and experiences coherently. This model also had ethical implications. Rejecting stasis, Roger moved way from absolute, abstract value concepts. He argued that moral evaluation should likewise be understood as a constant process. Values should be understood as empirically derived—and universal precisely because they emerge from the process of the human organism:

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<sup>14</sup> Viktor Frankl’s logotherapy, for instance, was sympathetic to Rogers's: it maintained the will to meaning as fundamental to human nature and cultivated the person's desire to locate a meaning in life as a means to bring forth her own potential. Paul Goodman and Franz Perls existential gestalt therapy, founded around the same time as Rogers’s, shared Rogers's goal of helping people become more present to themselves but was very directive, even antagonistic and manipulative (Grogan 2006). In this sense, it amplified the power dynamics inherent to traditional therapy methods, exploited the more destructive nature of relationships, and was completely opposed to Rogerian principles like unconditional positive regard.

Evidence from therapy indicates that both personal and social values emerge as natural, and experienced, when the individual is close to his own organismic valuing process. The suggestion is that though modern man no longer trusts religion or science or philosophy nor any system of beliefs to *give* him his values, he may find an organismic valuing base within himself which, if he can learn again to be in touch with it, will prove to be an organized, adaptive and social approach to the perplexing value issues which face all of us. (Rogers, "Toward a Modern Approach to Values" 27)

Rogers likened such an ethics to the experience of infants, whose "valuing process," he argued, is not fixed but always changing in relation to its needs at a particular moment, meaning the infant's values are differentiated and not based on general principles. This attempt to root ethics in the individual self echoes Macdonald's "The Root is Man" by arguing for a type of situational ethics that, he argued, was harder to live but "sounder" for the present era, which lacked a "unified purpose," and was the "only conceivable kind of ethic" "in a world where the whole situation is changing so rapidly that I feel that ordinary lists of values are probably not as appropriate or meaningful as they were in periods gone by" (Rogers *Man and Ideas* 102, 77, "The Emerging Person" 151). What we locate when we are free to choose our values is something that is good for us *and* for others. Making little distinction between biological needs and emotional ones, or indeed between need and value, Rogers went on to argue that what was important in his analogy was not value content but the method that it revealed: "It is fluid, flexible, based on this particular moment, and the degree to which this moment is experienced as enhancing and actualizing. Values are not rigidly held, but are continually changing" (Ibid. 21). The period called for a re-positioning of the self as the ultimate source of moral evaluation.

By rooting ethics in the person's own biology and ability to evaluate for herself—such that it was universal but flexible, shared but self-determined—Rogers engaged the inherently undemocratic deterministic discourses of radical behaviorism and Freudian theory. Writing

within a field shaped by concerns about power and citizenship, Rogers's approach maintained that the parameters provided by biology, society, culture, and authority still could not determine who one was or what one would become (Dialogues 119, 120). This meant that politically and personally your circumstances would not define you. It also meant that, while institutions like the welfare state could offer necessary provisions, real cultural or political change required development of the interpersonal relationships that would foster greater self-congruence and self-understanding (Rogers *Man and Ideas* 84-86). Meaningful change in our experience of the world would necessarily involve growth in personality, which meant real transformation of quality of life was constituted between persons.<sup>15</sup>

One of the first places Rogers extended his ideas outside of the clinical setting was to education. Application of a person-centered approach in the classroom had political import, because she believed it was the place where democratic subjects were made: by intervening in the educational system, which tended towards fostering conformism and technical knowledge, and thus were "more damaging than helpful to personality development", we might "improve our interpersonal relationships," and thus encourage the growth of "persons who will be adaptive and creative, able to make responsible choice, open to the kaleidoscopic changes in their world, worthy citizens of a fantastically expanding universe" (Rogers "The Emerging Person" 150, "Learning to Be Free" 43-44). Progressive education and student-centered thinking of course did not originate with Rogers, but he was a significant voice in denouncing conclusion-based learning in favor of a more holistic approach, advocating for the abolishment of examinations

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<sup>15</sup> Erich Fromm's work on love, which emphasized things like care and responsibility, was proximate to this model but placed its emphasis on freedom and was above all an analysis of society in relation to authoritarianism, conformity, and alienation. See Fromm, *The Art of Loving*. This overlap is unsurprising considering that Roger's, in conjunction with Elias H. Porter, performed a psychometric study of Fromm's characteristics of personality at the University of Chicago in the early 1950s.

and grades and focusing on the reframing the role of the teacher as non-directive and premised in developing relationships with students (Grogan 147).<sup>16</sup> The teacher's job became not to organize lesson plans but to offer acceptance, empathy, provide raw information to students, and facilitate “channels by which the student can avail himself of these resources” (Rogers “Learning to Be Free” 47). Conflict over Rogers’s employment of such techniques at the University of Wisconsin were a major factor in Rogers’s decision to leave the academy in 1963 for the Western Behavioral Sciences Institute and later to found his Center for the Studies of the Person in La Jolla, California in 1967. Indeed, the egalitarian implications of Rogers’s model rubbed many the wrong way; the disruptive consequences predicted to be associated with subversion of the relationship between teacher and student for educational institutions reflected the same anxieties about the destabilization of the field of psychology foreseen by undermining of the role of the therapist.

Rogers rarely directly addressed himself to political events or social issues until the end of the 1960s decade, when he became more vocal about his support for progressive politics.<sup>17</sup> He had always, however, maintained a sort of general support that framed dissent as a form of self-assertion—evidence of people striving to participate in the decisions affecting their lives (Rogers *Man and Ideas* 103). People trying to speak their voices was certainly a “healthy trend” (Ibid. 84). Rogers was encouraged by U.S. New Left groups' emphasis on forms of congruence that he found akin to those he had been working to foster in the client-therapist relationship; indeed, his perception was that these groups and organizations valued flexibility and were searching for a more sensible way to “meet reality,” meant that, even if they were mistaken in how they went

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<sup>16</sup> Rogers noted the work of August Aichorn and A. S. Neill. Paul Goodman and George Dennison, were also extending the progressive ideas of John Dewey, and were similarly proponents of smaller student bodies and ungraded schools (Grogan 147).

<sup>17</sup> See Rogers, “Some Social Issues Which Concern Me.”

about it—and Rogers found some of their actions mistaken—these were nonetheless people working to find a new ways of being and relating, which he found promising (Ibid. 104).

Rogers was more hesitant about the scene that grew up around encounter groups and group therapy in California during this period, fearing that they had "gone completely wild" with extreme and often superficial versions of the therapies he and many of his peers had been developing, versions that threatened to obscure the important social possibilities inherent in group therapy (Rogers *Man and Ideas* 32). Rogers was an early and committed proponent of encounter groups and advocated a non-directive approach to their facilitation, which like education scaled up his clinical learnings to impact larger groups of people—he even wrote a book on leading encounter groups in 1970.<sup>18</sup> Implicit in his work with larger groups during this period was belief in something that would become more explicit decades later, when he began leading conflict mediating intercultural encounter groups for promoting peace in South Africa, Belfast, and Central America, work that resulted in him being nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize in 1987: there were social, and therefore political, implications to the technology of the person-centered approach (Grogan 304, Rogers "Resolving Intercultural Tensions" 444). These group encounters encouraged productive forms of honest confrontation. Creating a group environment that upheld Rogers's "necessary conditions" would create a warm, loving environment in which people could safely acknowledge themselves and their feelings, growing personally within the interpersonal dynamic of the group.

*Journey into Self*, the 1969 Best Documentary Feature film offering a window into a 16-hour marathon group therapy session led by Rogers and Farson, helps to illustrate how Rogers

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<sup>18</sup> Rogers also sponsored some racial encounter groups, though these were not the emphasis of his work encounter group work.

understood the implications of encounter groups.<sup>19</sup> The 47-minute film is an edited-down version of a weekend-long group session that highlights the stories of just four of the eight volunteer participants: Beth, a housewife who has difficulty showing affection except to her cat; Roz, a Eurasian woman who feels alienated from her feminine delicateness and boarding school upbringing; Jerry, a businessman who does not believe he needs other people; and Carlene, a black woman who remains quiet through most of the film out of fear of rejection based on her race. The film, which has been used as training video for the Rogerian method, is in black and white, with very basic production quality, and is mostly composed of close-ups of the faces of various group members, which are focalized by the lighting. On a few occasions, the group is shot from above, revealing the group members to be arranged in a circle. Rogers and Farson are also part of the circle and periodically ask questions to help reframe, affirm, or unpack the comments of the other participants, but without taking an assertive role in the group.

The first minutes of the film show director Stanley Kramer, by that time an experienced, often-nominated director and producer, introduces the documentary as "one of the most extraordinary, remarkable pieces of film I've ever seen" and explains how the group was established (they are volunteer participants), framing the therapy session as motivated by investigation of what it means to be oneself and to see what other people are like when they are themselves—exploration of the "secret of being together".<sup>20</sup> As the film shifts to the scene of the session, Rogers opens the group's dialogue in a non-directive way, inviting the participants to

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<sup>19</sup> There is surprisingly little critical attention to this film—both in academic literature or periodicals of the period. I was able to find two accounts of the film during the period: one is a short write up in the *LA Times*, "Taking off the Masks", that appeared after the film was nominated for an Academy Award, and the other is an article in *The Counseling Psychologist* published in 1970, "Inside A Basic Encounter Group" by William Coulsen, who worked at Rogers's Center for Studies of the Person, which uses the complete footage of the 16-hour session as a case study in outlining the elements of an effective encounter group.

<sup>20</sup> Kramer is known for directing and/or producing films with a strong social message, including *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, *The Defiant Ones*, *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World*, and *Judgment at Nuremberg*.

consider the session "an opportunity to *be* in the group as fully as we can; maybe in some respects to try ways of being or ways of relating to each other that we never quite have had nerve enough to try before." During several moments of the film, the four protagonists seem to have taken up this appeal, confirming the reparative potential of the Rogerian method. For instance, Roz, expressing desire to take off the "mask" she wears to protect herself from others, but admitting she does not "know how" because it has become "part of myself," affirms that she cannot do this work of self-reorganization by herself. She needs others to help her accept herself: "maybe that is what I'm looking for." Jerry, who begins the session stating that he has no real friends and does not think he needs any, ends up breaking down into violent tears, and is then embraced by Roz, as the affective community created by the group facilitates a breakthrough in his understanding of what it means to feel part of, and want to belong to, a community.

A few minutes after the dramatic and emotional moment in which we see Jerry cry and Roz cross the room to embrace him, Carlene is moved to tears—which, after being prompted by Farson, she reveals are tears of self-criticism for having allowed her skin color to keep her from expressing solidarity with Jerry, who is seated next to her. Even though "I wanted so badly to reach out to you, Jerry, I was kind of boiling inside," Carlene explains that she "couldn't do it," because she feared that her touch would make him uncomfortable—would "embarrass" him or "put you on a spot". Her tears bear witness to her profound frustration that "I have to always think Negro first...I've only felt once in my life that I was a person first" (on a trip to Europe, she says). "[N]ever in this country [had she] been able to just feel that I could do something like this."

Carlene's account of her tears is a rich articulation of the ways feelings entwine with objective social structures that are both entirely impersonal and yet very intimately experienced:

she is crying, she says, because she had wanted to apologize to Jerry for her own inability to feel that she “was a person first,” but she was also unable to actually say she was sorry for feeling racially self-conscious. This was bound up in feeling she “resented Roz” for being able to do the very thing she had wanted to do: reach out to touch Jerry. She cried too because she “hated myself” for not being able to just “overlook everything” and do what she wanted regardless, though she knows that she “wouldn’t have done it” and “I know why and this is what upsets me.” In other words, Carlene wishes she could have overlooked or resisted the feelings holding her back but acknowledges it was “this darn country” that put her in a position where she automatically first thought about how Jerry would react even to a gesture motivated by concern, which is what really upset her.

The racial dynamic of the circle thus foregrounded, the attention that had previously been directed at Eurasian Roz and her “mask,” her battle with objectifying stereotypes, is re-contextualized. For Roz, who is extremely forthcoming, has been serving as a social glue for the group and was quick to physically comfort the weeping Jerry, whereas Carlene, as a black woman, instead experienced her color as an obstacle to full participation in the community constituted by the group. The racial distinctiveness of her inhibitions and of her fear of disrupting the climate of the conversation, explicitly raised by her words, are never directly addressed by the other group members during the footage included in film, which ends shortly afterwards. The only resolution we witness is Rogers take Carlene's hand. In this sense, the film becomes an unscripted testament to the felt experience of racism and to the ways it shapes interpersonal relations but leaves those experiential facts hanging in a state of irresolution. It moreover probes at the “unconditional positive regard” putatively underwriting Rogers's approach and his claim that “national and racial cultural differences come to seem unimportant as the *person* is

discovered" through the Rogerian method ("Resolving Intercultural Tensions" CR Reader 444). Indeed, Rogers believed that the "finale [of racial encounter groups] is that they tend to become persons to each other, and can talk openly and freely...without references to stereotypes or skin color" (Rogers "Some Issues Which Concern Me" 52). Did the film stop short of this therapeutic finale?—was Carlene's acknowledgment of her feelings a breakthrough in her and the group's growth that would have enable them to move beyond color if the film had continued? Watching the film with Rogers's work in mind, these and other questions emerge to suggest that perhaps Rogers misrecognized or misunderstood forms of "incongruence" rooted in structural inequalities, for the forms of self disorganization and disjunction to which Carlene's tears speak seem unresolvable even by the warm interpersonal relationships produced by this group or others following Rogers's model.

In an interview with Irene Hawkins, Farson explained that Carlene's tearful moment was a key driver in decisions about the production of the film (Farson Interview).<sup>21</sup> After seeing the footage of the marathon session and showing it to the staff at the Western Behavioral Sciences Institute—which funded the film and was directed by Farson, and with which Rogers worked—Farson, Rogers, and Bill McGaw, who directed and produced the film, decided to show the clip to Kramer. Kramer agreed to help them edit their footage into a film, convinced by the potential of what he saw in the clip. Kramer is credited by Farson in the interview for helping edit the film into something capable of winning the Academy Award and is also specially thanked during the film's closing credits for his "vital" contribution.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> The significance of this as an editorial choice is dramatized by William Coulson article "The Basic Encounter Group," which uses the full footage of this therapy session as a case study in how to facilitate a successful encounter group, emphasizes the moment of the man crying and being embraced as the group's central moment of growth and does not even mention the racialized moment that occurs immediately afterwards.

<sup>22</sup> It memorably won when the category's original winning documentary was disqualified for being produced in 1967 (Farson Interview).

The film in many ways speaks to the potential of Rogers's method: Jerry's final comments show a man who has progressed from fear of getting close to others to someone who has come to the "irreversible," according to Rogers, conclusion that it is possible to become closer to others and to be cared about. His words seem a real testament to the idea of unconditional positive regard and to the idea that psychic growth is explicitly tied to relationships with others: he talks about his breakthrough almost entirely in relational terms, which is perhaps why the film ends with his concluding reflections. The film also suggests that Rogers's method is able to open up space for engagement with even fraught, race-based feelings, since Carlene does eventually voice her inner struggle and illuminate how race was quietly organizing the group's world.

Yet the film also indexes the problem of scaling therapy and the difficulty for Rogers's model of addressing the structural aspects of psychic experience, as being able to "meet each other as persons" is clearly not able to resolve the factors for which Carlene is in a position of "always holding back" ("Some Issues Which Concern Me").<sup>23</sup> While we do not know the aftereffects of the encounter group--it may have been productive in helping Carlene to negotiate the various feelings attached to her experience of race or to feel more confident in how to respond in interracial settings, and it may even have brought other group members to think about race in new, transformative ways--those changes do relatively little to eradicate the systemic racial inequalities underpinning the scene. Rogers's model had no interest in interrogating the origin of the personality problems it hoped to repair: the flip-side to rejecting Freud's attention to the client's past and instead focusing on forward movement was neglect of the forces

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<sup>23</sup> No less than Rogers's own daughter, Natalie Rogers, who also became a humanist psychologist, would voice a gender- and race-based critique of both humanist psychology and her father's method—a critique that did not gain much traction until the 1980s (Grogan 257).

that had given shape to the client's self-concept. The epiphanic moments of therapeutic encounter were moreover given weight to neutralize the impact of social and political circumstance. Rogers himself acknowledged that there would need to be investment in encounter groups on a large scale for them to begin to transform society more generally. "[T]here needs to be a lot of follow-up, and, furthermore... a mass approach", he told Farson in an interview, and "follow-up for several hundred people takes funds" (Rogers *Man and Ideas* 86, 88).

Another way of looking at this problem in Rogers's work is the criticism of the client-therapist relationship that developed in the dialogue between Rogers and Martin Buber. Rogers's desire to radically equalize the dynamic between therapist and client so that it resembled the mutuality and subject-to-subject relation of Buber's I-Thou relationship was not only unique and disciplinarily disruptive—it was also contended by Buber himself, who did not believe it possible for the power differential between a professional giver-of-help and a seeker-of-help to ever disappear. "I see you *mean* being on the same plane," he told Rogers in a conversation at the University of Michigan in 1957, "but you cannot. There is not only you, your mode of thinking, your mode of doing, there is also a certain situation...Neither you nor he look on *your* experience. The subject is exclusively he and his experience. He cannot in the course of, let's say, a talk with you, he cannot change his position" (Rogers *Dialogues* 50-51). Buber insisted that the objective situation underwriting the therapeutic encounter undermined its ability to ever be a truly equal meeting persons. Despite Rogers's assertion that "in those moments when real change occurred...it would be because there had been a real meeting of persons in which it was experienced he same from both sides," Buber argued that the possibility for an I-Thou encounter was inhibited by the structural situation informing the exchange. For Buber the motivation behind the clinical relationship, the idea of seeking help, with one figure in the

position of being able to give it while the other was always receiving assistance, foreclosed the intersubjective potential of the encounter. Moreover, despite Roger's commitment to the fundamental relatedness of the person, Buber argued, the Rogerian model privileged the process of self organization: it framed interpersonal relation as essentially aimed toward the self-actualization of one (at times perhaps both) of the people in relation (Thorne 95). Instead, for Buber relationality was an end in itself. In this way Rogers was ultimately "more concerned with the becoming of the person," as the moderator of the Rogers-Buber dialogue had concluded; "he speaks of the locus of value as being inside one, whereas...Dr. Buber...sees value as more in the between"—in that which was constituted between and connected the two people in relation (Rogers Dialogues 62).

The difference between these two positions points to Buber's interest in the moment of recognition of the otherness of the other, whereas Rogers was ultimately interested in recognition of self-sameness: realization that the other is like myself and, even more importantly, realization like Jerry's that I can be loved by the other. Buber's ethics of relationality conversely is much more about reciprocity and mutuality than empathy, valorization of a form of relationality ongoing in time and space that need not be communicated or clarifying. The Rogers-Buber dialogue thus illuminates a tension between self and other in Rogers's model that complicates its relational paradigm. Perhaps by vocation, Rogers ultimately subordinates the interpersonal relationship to the ongoing process of self growth and is more interested in countering a mechanistic account of man than in relationality for its own sake. But still it is the power of learning to relate, to feel oneself really *be in relation*, that resounds at the end of *Journey into Self*. For at least some of those participants, the experience of being part of an empathetic community was no small matter.

## Wellfleet Psychohistory: Keniston, Lifton, and the Case of the New Left

As the pluralization of the field of psychology was accompanied by the migration of psychological vocabulary into mainstream discourse, Erik Erikson's concepts of "identity" and "identity crisis" were perhaps two of the most conspicuous examples. Erikson published *Childhood and Society* in 1950, the text that introduced the concept of identity as we now know it: an essential quality of the human personality tied to individuality, social role, nationality, race, and sexuality (Medovoi 6). This work quickly traversed the U.S. social sciences and became "a college textbook bestseller" (Ibid.). Erikson advanced a form of Neo-Freudian psychoanalysis that exploited ambiguities in Freudian theory to highlight the "psychosocial, cultural, historical, and ego developmental aspects" of the person as indices of her individuality (Lifton "Origins of Psychohistory" 174, Lunbeck 224).<sup>24</sup> As Erikson elaborated it, "identity" was "a process, a mode of self-experience, and an unalterable aspect of self" that represented "a sense of sameness, a unity of personality now felt by the individual and recognized by others as having consistency in time" (Lunbeck 224, Erikson "Youth: fidelity and diversity" 11). It functioned as part of Erikson's larger psycho-social developmental theory, which posited eight universal stages of human life defined by conflicts or crises that the individual had to resolve in relation to its social environment. The concept of identity, understood as partially conscious but largely unconscious, allowed Erikson to address the new patient of psychoanalysis, the high-functioning normal, by employing an idiom that could address both the disturbed and the sane and that recognized personality as subjectivity

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<sup>24</sup> The role of Erikson's identity in shaping the preoccupations of postwar culture, and especially its function in shaping the period's imaginary of youth, has been widely noted. See, for instance, Leerom Medovoi's *Rebels*.

experienced, “not ascribed from without” as in a classical psychoanalytic framework (Erikson "Youth: fidelity and diversity" 11; Lunbeck 229, 335).<sup>25</sup>

The “identity crisis,” a concept which Erikson had first developed to describe war veterans, was elaborated as a particular but normal stage in the development of adult personality growth that took place during adolescence, the period of transition between childhood to adulthood during which individuals became more closely attuned to, and had to come to terms with, society and history (Hine 251). Erikson framed adolescence as a stage characterized by negotiation of social roles and of the discrepancy between how others see the individual and the individual's self-concept that was often tied to rebellion against familial and other institutional structures; adolescence functioned as a pivotal moment in identity formation, often by means of the resolution of an identity crisis (Medovoi 6). The identity crisis was thus normalized as an “expected stage of adolescence and young adulthood,” part of the usual process of growth and personality differentiation that marked the individual's increased engagement with her historical moment and “feelings related to personal uniqueness” (Lunbeck 229, Hine 39, Herman 292). Erikson argued that this crisis in the adolescent's sense of self would get resolved through psychological negotiation of a line of continuity between the individual's past and her desires for her future.

As an increasingly theorized object of study during the postwar period, adolescence served as a category for elaborating thorny questions about the role of social or societal influence

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<sup>25</sup> Lunbeck points out that Erikson’s use of “ego-identity” confused what Erikson’s contemporaries “insisted [in Freud] were the ego’s two referents: the first, more narrowly technical, an internal mental agency (along with the id and the superego), and the second, more expansive, ‘the self’...Ego psychologists maintained that Freud had been guilty of a similar offense, using the term...as ambiguously as Erikson later did... It is in part Erikson’s inattention to the obsessive boundary policing of his colleagues, his exploiting of the ambiguity inherent in Freud’s texts, that accounts for his popularity. Erikson identified with the phenomenological aspects and the literary qualities in Freud...Erikson’s kinship with Freud was cemented by what he saw as their common interest in ‘man’s total existence’: the individual as he radiated outward to the community, fueled by the ‘anticipation of new potentialities’ (Lunbeck 229-30).

on personality and behavior and about ideals for postwar citizenship.<sup>26</sup> Erikson's approach to adolescence rendered it a period of "psychopolitical self-determination" that helped to resolve tensions within liberal social science about conformity: Erikson's healthy psychological subject created its self-image by "neither blind acceptance nor unthinking rejection of the image offered by the other" (Medovoi 7). In this sense Erikson's framework offered a form of self-determination that helped assuage anxieties within qualitative liberalism about the consumerism and compliance of the U.S.'s expanding managerial class, by intimating that the adults inhabiting the country's exploding suburbs were not "other-directed" as was feared: they had simply already passed through their periods of identity crisis and were now well-adjusted adults (Medovoi 8-9). Emerging within qualitative liberalism's Cold War concerns about autonomy, massification, and free thinking, Erikson's ideas had considerable purchase in the period, especially its accounts of its young people.<sup>27</sup>

Erikson's work on adolescence and identity also served as the basis from which he would later develop the Wellfleet Psychohistory Group with Lifton and Keniston in the mid-1960s. Growing out of a series of conversations between Erikson and Lifton in Wellfleet, Massachusetts the winter of 1964-1965, Wellfleet psychohistory was an interdisciplinary initiative interrogating the intersect of personal psychology and collective experience, individual psyche and historical ethos. In addition to the three psychologists, the Wellfleet circle also included psychiatrists Frederick Wyatt and Robert Coles, historian Bruce Mazlish, and sociologists Kai Erikson and Philip Rieff (Lifton "Origins of Psychohistory" 180). Later additions to the group included Norman Birnbaum and Richard Sennett.

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<sup>26</sup> For a historical account of the evolution of the concept of adolescence in the United States and its intersect with political and social concerns, see *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager* by Thomas Hine. For an account of its unfolding in the 1950s and 1960s, see Leerom Medovoi's *Rebel*.

<sup>27</sup> See Lunbeck, Medovoi, Herman, Hine.

Lifton would later locate the group's origins in a concept of psychohistory that emerged in a meeting of minds in the mid-1960s, but a more thorough account would perhaps stretch back a decade before and point toward a range of academic events that opened up discursive space for the marriage of psychiatry and history, including publication of Erikson's *Young Man Luther* (1958), William Langer's presidential address to the American Historical Association (1957), a symposium on psychoanalysis at the New York University Institute of Philosophy (1958), and the spread of the work of Erich Fromm and Wilhelm Reich (Lifton "Origins of Psychohistory" 171). Indeed, the application of psychoanalysis to questions of history did not begin with the Wellfleet group. Fromm, for one, took great offense at the group's neglect of his work as an important precursor to their own: "the fact is not mentioned that I started psycho-historical research back in the early thirties with the 'Dogma of Christ,' and continued it in *Escape from Freedom*"—an oversight likely attributable to Fromm's declining reputation with U.S. scholars at the time, who tended to see him as "simplistic, popularist, and superficial" (Ibid. 185, 187).<sup>28</sup> The influence of Fromm seems likely, since his work had been influential on Riesman, one of their early mentors—but according to its own account, the Wellfleet Group was primarily born

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<sup>28</sup> "Erich Fromm received a copy of the *Wellfleet Papers* (Lifton & Olson, 1974) in early 1975. After glancing through the book, he wrote to his old friend, Harvard sociologist David Riesman: 'I was surprised to find that in Lifton's presentation the impression is given that he and Erikson discovered psycho-history in the 50s or 60s, I forget at the moment when, and that the fact is not mentioned that I started psycho-historical research back in the early thirties with the 'Dogma of Christ,' and continued it in *Escape from Freedom*, in both instances trying to use psychoanalytic viewpoints to understand a historical process. . . I am just curious why these people proceed this way. They must know my work and it is difficult for me to imagine that they should be so possessed by the ambition to appear as the originators of a thought, that they would consciously and intentionally refuse to mention my work for such personal purposes...There are discernible 'psychohistorical' elements in 'The Dogma of Christ,' but the article failed to make an impact on the Wellfleet group or on the psychohistorical genre as a whole. It was published as an English translation in a collection of Fromm's articles in 1963, 2 years before the official formation of the Wellfleet group.... In the foreword to the volume, Fromm (1963, pp. viii–ix) wrote that 'As far as I know, this is the first work in which the attempt was made to transcend the psychologicistic approach to historical and social phenomena so customary in psychoanalytic literature . . . Whatever the merits of this interpretation, the method of the application of psychoanalysis to historical phenomena is the one which has been developed in my subsequent books.' Considering Fromm's explicit claim that he had developed psychoanalytic interpretations of history over the years, it is quite remarkable that neither Erikson, nor Lifton, nor any other member of the Wellfleet group, took any interest in investigating and discussing this claim. Fromm was neither refuted nor acknowledged by the group—he was simply ignored" (Lifton "Origins of Psychohistory" 185-187).

out of Erikson's work on identity, which he also applied to historical moments and to the psychology of great men of history, and was also informed by Lifton's exploration of "individual experience in holocaust and historical change" and the group's realization of "how little we still really knew about psychological interaction between 'the individual' and 'the collectivity'" (Lifton preface). Psychohistory directly addressed itself to excavating an "approach for understanding the complex constellation of forces that operate in historical change" (Lifton "On Psychology and History, Further Comment" 128). "For it is precisely the in-between area—the realm in which man's inner life makes contact with his history—that we need to know more about if we are to grasp something of what is happening to us in the midst of the human experiment, and indeed begin to exert a measure of desperately-needed mastery over our own history" (Ibid. 132).

Erikson was clearly "the unofficial intellectual leader" at Wellfleet: historians were the minority in the group, whose impulse was interdisciplinary but tone was distinctly set by a psychoanalytic and psycho-social perspective (Lifton "Origins of Psychohistory" 180). While Erikson was the father of the group, and had laid the theoretical groundwork for its interventions, it was Kenneth Keniston, also a psychoanalyst and another founding member of Wellfleet, who was perhaps most aligned with Lifton in outlook and method. Having met Lifton at Harvard in the 1950s, when both scholars formed part "of an amorphous subculture" surrounding David Riesman that was "concerned with a variety of stimulating combinations of psychological and social thought and ethical and political questions around war and peace," Keniston shared Lifton's interest in Riesman's and Erikson's work (Lifton preface 12). Whereas Erikson was primarily interested in applying his Freudian-inspired developmental analysis to the biographies of individual figures, including Hamlet, Luther, and Gandhi, Keniston and Lifton extended

Erikson's developmental model more directly to history itself. Like Erikson they treated the postwar era as a sort of historical identity crisis—framing it as a collective search for a line of continuity between the past and the future amidst a period of rapid change--but also elaborated this claim by investigating how and why this crisis unfolded.

These two perspectives also diverged in terms of theoretical commitment: "The two positions of course overlap," Lifton explained, "and it is not always possible to distinguish one from the other... the first seeking, at least theoretically, a synthesis between Freud and Marx... as a way of grappling with contemporary issues; and the second emphasizing the need for new social theory, to which psychohistory can contribute, that draws upon Freud and Marx but has considerable autonomy from both" (Lifton Preface 16). Whereas Rogers's work had been substantiated by transcripts of clinical sessions and experiments intended to apply "objective" scientific rigor to his theory, Lifton's and Keniston's work largely made use of interviews and was upfront about its leftist political sympathies. Explicit about this bias, Keniston and Lifton viewed their work as theorizing a new framework for understanding the intersect of individual psychology with historical forces that rejected a causal model of relation between individuals and history and that pushed beyond the psychology of historical actors to specifically address how forms of experience could be collectively shared. "A major theme in the Wellfleet discussions in the late 1960s and early 1970s was the possibility of developing psychohistory not only as a method for studying social change but also as a theory that could itself contribute to social change" (Lifton *Origins of Psychohistory* 184).

Like humanistic psychology, Wellfleet psychohistory can be understood as a response to and critique of the growth and consolidation of the discipline of psychiatry in the postwar period, but the group's approach maintained stronger ties to the Freudian tradition and institutional

psychology. The American Academy of Arts and Sciences originally provided financial support for the Wellfleet initiative, which practically played out as a series of meetings in Wellfleet—one of which was used to create a special issue for ASA's journal *Daedalus* and others that resulted in various publications, including Erikson's *Youth: Change and Challenge*, Keniston's *Young Radicals*, and a collection of essays called *The Wellfleet Papers*, which was edited by Lifton. The ASA's funding incentivized the group toward unity and encouraged them to create an institutional manifestation of their initiatives, one that would be able to train young scholars in the principles psychohistory, but they were ultimately unable to establish a theoretical framework cohesive enough to support this type of institution and the group eventually felt compelled to stop accepting this funding and decentralize in the late 1960s (Lifton Preface 15).

Thus, if Rogers's positions led him to move his research outside the academy, Wellfleet psychohistory was solidly ensconced within it, and despite its criticisms of Freud, Lifton and Erikson continued to consider themselves psychoanalysts. The Wellfleet group maintained a disciplinary commitment to "psychoanalytic theory as superior to its main rivals, neo-behaviorism and humanistic psychology," which it identified as anti-historical. Though Wellfleet psychohistory argued that neither classic psychoanalysis nor ego psychology adequately considered the complicated interplay of large-scale historical forces on individual experience, they believed that the psychoanalytic method did at least concern itself with individual histories. History, meanwhile, tended to be "unconcerned with the fact that" moral imagery and the "prototypes guiding parental administrations originate in the past struggles of contending cultural and national 'species', which also color fairytale and family lore, superstition and gossip, and the simple lessons of early verbal training"; they thus missed how "these ideas reach down into the lives of generations and re-emerge through the daily awakening and training of historical

consciousness in young individuals" (Erikson "Youth: fidelity and diversity" 20). It was against the backdrop of this critique of history that the group attempted to psychologize history and against the background of psychological work such as Rogers's, which focused exclusively on the present moment of the therapeutic encounter and forward-moving personality change, that the Wellfleet group insisted on historicizing psychology, highlighting the therapeutic encounter as a historically embedded process. Even this interaction, they argued, was made possible by specific situations and forces (Lifton "Origins of Psychohistory" 188, "Wellfleet" 30-31).

Wellfleet psychohistory was naturally tasked with how to define history across the disciplinary differences of its members and in light of its critical objectives. To do so, it made reference to Erikson's works' framing of history as "a series of shared psychosocial experiences" (Lifton "On Psychology and History: Further Comment" 132). "[P]sychoanalytic psychology and psychiatry can and should have a great deal to say" about history, Lifton argued, "but only if they.... surrender old notions of absolute cause-and-effect in favor of more subtle formulations, consistent with current scientific developments, of interacting patterns and constellations always in flux" (Ibid.). Since history greatly shaped the developmental matrix of human personality growth, it informed individual psyches. Over time, these historically informed personalities would also reshape the norms and institutions making up the developmental matrix--but the relationship between these processes was neither straightforward nor unidirectional.

History for Wellfleet essentially merged the dimensions of "history" taken up by psychology with the version advanced by history as a discipline: it was first and foremost a critique of "remediable inadequacies in psychological theory" (Keniston "Accounting for Change" 125). As Keniston pointed out, "when the psychologist says 'history,' he usually means 'case history,' and in 'case history' he usually omits the social and 'historical' forces which most

concern the historian” (Ibid.123). Maintaining the case history as an important point of reference but eschewing “overpersonalization and a clinical time-perspective” by tracking the large scale forces and events also shaping how the personality could develop, Wellfleet rejected psychological approaches like those emphasized by Rogers, which emphasized personal experience but could not speak to individual experience of structural problems or collective experiences (Ibid 123). “Clinicians are at their best in showing the early roots of the constancies and conflicts of adulthood; they are at their weakest, I think, in accounting for why adults change, sometimes rapidly and radically, in response to the pressures of their adult worlds (Ibid. 125). “[P]sychology must become not merely case-historical but truly historical,” Keniston maintained (Ibid. 126). History, meanwhile, needed “new categories and typologies” to organize historical inquiry that would “do some of the conceptual spadework which must precede” explanations of historical change (Ibid. 118, 119).

By psychologizing history and calling psychology to turn historical, the Wellfleet psychohistorians attempted to explore adult personality change and the psychic origins and implications of mass movements. The historical idiom allowed them to address the personal effects of impersonal structures and mass belief systems. Psychohistorical processes were theorized as patterns of imagery... not exclusively derived from either internal psychological processes or social currents of thought” but a symbolic unification and mobilization of both (Lifton “On Psychology and History: Further Comment” 128). This drove both Lifton and Keniston toward conceptualization of such themes as individual and collective time imagery, the effect of historical currents on individual behavior, the dialectic between the reality of events and their perceived symbolic meanings, and psychic need for change or for stability as historical

drivers (Lifton “Review of *Psychoanalysis and History*”).<sup>29</sup> Symbolization of time played a key role in their methodology, because it was theorized as "an individual's attempt to come to terms with the extra-personal and historical past as well as the personal and case- historical past. Or put more precisely, time-imagery seems to me an attempt to cope with an individual past which includes the historical" (Keniston "Accounting for Change" 121).

This approach encompassed study of “a variety of cooperative factors,” including “the idiosyncratic experiences of each individual, the kind of family structure he grows up in, his social and economic position, his age, the organizations to which he belongs, the social, economic and political institutions of his society, the central values of his culture, and, not least of all, his experience of social and historical change” (Ibid. 122). It was premised in conviction that adults could and did change and that childhood was not the only form of history relevant to the development of the personality. This was an argument away from traditional psychoanalysis toward developmental models of psycho-social development: "certainly one of the most important contributions of psychoanalysis has been to make us more skeptical of apparently ‘total’ changes of ideology and personality in adulthood, and to make us search for the constant core in the convert or the revolution. But at the same time, people (and peoples) do observably change, and in adulthood." (Ibid. 125). It was also premised on an idea of self not constituted by Freudian drives but by the symbolic realm, the self created by the psychohistorical (Lifton's Method 134)

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<sup>29</sup> “Although not the same as the patterns of shared identity described by Erik Erikson, they owe much to his pioneering efforts to bring psychoanalysis into history; and they provide what Erikson has described as a sense of psychohistorical actuality. That is, through this shared imagery, young Japanese can experience a sense of psychological immediacy and relevance which they strongly seek. These patterns of imagery are not exclusively derived from either internal psychological processes or social currents of thought; rather, they bring together, and symbolically recreate, the two” (“On Psychology and History: Further Comment” 128).

Symbolizations of time clearly changed across historical periods and the patterns indexed by their process of creation and evolution, the psychohistorians argued, linked the personal to the collective and the collective to the universal. For instance, Lifton framed his work on Japanese postwar young people as “related to the psychological and social currents of Japanese cultural tradition; to psychobiological tendencies common to all mankind; and to forces of historical change, particularly modern and contemporary, in Japan and throughout the world” (Lifton, “Youth in Postwar Japan” 218). Greater elaboration of the historically particular nature of a given psychic experience was understood to point toward themes that were universally shared. In this sense, Lifton and Keniston exhibited an impulse, similar to Rogers's with moral valuation, to conceptualize a register of universalism that offered the flexibility of particularism through its rooting it in the psychobiological.

A major factor motivating this work was the Wellfleet psychohistorians' reading of their 1960s historical moment as evidencing a “worldwide crisis”: “radical psychohistorical dislocation” on a mass scale tied to how people consciously and unconsciously represented and made sense of individual and collective pasts and futures. The threat of nuclear annihilation, rapid technological change, and the undermining of value systems were cited as major contributing factors to this crisis, as they were “associated with the breakdown of viable modes of symbolic immortality”—or forms of symbolically continuing on after death (Lifton 38-39). Such transformations of the context in how individuals progressively developed their personalities destabilized the ability of individuals to locate the cultural forms to give meaning to their lives or root their aspirations, which resulted in alienation (Lifton “Death and History” 209-210). Periods of similar desymbolization had also organized experience in other historical

moments. In fact, Lifton believed this problem helped to explain the prevalence across the international twentieth century of totalizing systems, which functionally answered needs for symbolic immortality (Ibid. 215). Framing the 1960s as a shared social identity crisis, in the sense that the disruptions of the postindustrial world incited a “loss of feelings related to personal uniqueness and historical continuity,” Keniston and Lifton framed the period’s emergent lifestyles and forms of belonging as entwined with the dissolution of “traditional symbolic systems that have sustained the sense of cultural tradition and historical continuity” (Origins of Psychohistory 184, Herman 292).

[A] good part of the untoward restiveness of affluent, educated young people today must be understood as a consequence of a massive historical change in the developmental matrix. Among other things, this new matrix promotes the individualization of moral judgments and the relativization of truth. One consequence is that a large minority of a youthful generation is unable, for better and for worse, to accept on faith previous moral evaluations or uncritically to accept traditional ways of viewing the world. These new mind-sets are not simply matters of the recurrence of perennial generational conflict... the drastically altered historical conditions of the twentieth century (extended mass education, widespread affluence, exposure to other cultures, threat of holocaust) have in turn changed the modal matrix of human development, “producing” on a mass scale a kind of questioning, restless youth who, if he existed at all in the past, was always part of a tiny and exceptional minority. (Keniston “Psychological Development and Historical Change” 344-45).

As this quote suggests, young people played a pivotal role in the elaboration of Keniston's and Lifton's theories. Keniston's work took up 1960s U.S. youth movements, while Lifton's work used youth in Japan and China as its point of entry for discussing the psychic consequences of traumatic historical events and the uptake of mass ideology. Despite addressing different populations, Keniston and Lifton believed their studies yielded similar results regarding the young's a pervasive sense of historical dislocation. “Erikson would characterize our youth culture as a psychosocial moratorium on adulthood...One of the main psychological functions of

a sense of identity is to provide a sense of inner self-sameness and continuity, to bind together the past, the present, and the future into a coherent whole; and the first task of adolescence and early childhood is the achievement of identity” (Keniston “Social Change and Youth in America” 178). Offering “few of what Erikson would call objects of ‘fidelity’”—or dependable objects to invest loyalty or aspiration in—the period was promoting a collective “identity crisis” felt most strongly by its youth (Ibid. 170).

Keniston distinguished "youth" from adolescence, as a separate stage of life mediating between adolescence and adulthood, arguing that in this developmental period the individual had already passed through their period of adolescent rebellion and personal identity crisis but still had an unresolved tension or ambivalence about her relationship to the "resources and demands of society" (Keniston "Youth: A New Stage" 634, 636). They could resolve this tension through a type of Jungian individuation, or self-integration, that enabled them to cope with and acknowledge their social reality, but did not necessarily mean either accepting, adjusting to, or opposing it (Ibid. 12-13). Youth as Keniston elaborated it was also a stage of considerable interpersonal development, characterized by increased ability to engage the other as another person, not emphasizing self-sameness but identifying them as an entirely different and separate self (Ibid. 644). Not every person would necessarily experience this life stage, Keniston argued, some would move directly from adolescence into adulthood, but the historical period's rising levels of education and prosperity, paired with its rapid technological change and atomic threat, meant it was witnessing youth's "emergence on a mass scale" (Ibid. 635).

Keniston’s work from the 1960s takes up campus unrest and mass youth movements as something widely considered a national problem and a point of anxiety for liberal social science.

His study, *Young Radicals: Notes on Committed Youth*, framed the phenomenon 1960s youth activism as a manifestation of the youth's desire for interpersonal relationships and communal belonging. Findings in *Young Radicals* detailed the parameters of his involvement with the youth in his study. The project, based on in-depth interviews Keniston conducted with seventeen youth working in the National Office of Vietnam Summer in 1967, came into being after Keniston was contacted by the organization and invited to study them. The book analyzes Keniston's interviews with a group primarily performing a leadership role in the organization. He describes six as relatively peripheral or less committed activists; the rest had considerable experience with political activism but were relatively moderate in their views. Those who considered themselves “radicals,” Keniston argued, would not have accepted leadership positions in Vietnam Summer—a project that could be pegged as coalitionist and bureaucratic, and therefore as too conservative (Keniston *YR* 15). Though three of his subjects did represent themselves as “militant,” most were open to “moderate” projects like middle-class organizing. Having already published a study on “uncommitted” or “alienated” youth in 1965, Keniston was particularly interested in why these subjects, who despite different positions on the political spectrum, self-identified as radicals and chose to express this identification through political activity differed from their non-active hippie peers.

Keniston’s *Young Radicals* presented several findings relevant for U.S. social science debates about the youth activists but focused in particular on the discovery that those involved with Vietnam Summer were motivated by a strong need for community and friendship. Their “personality and politics are impossible to separate,” Keniston wrote (*YR* 26). Indeed, those he interviewed identified political commitments as what helped them to ““move personally”” and

maintained that these commitments were premised first and foremost in interpersonal relationships: ““The politics came after the people. There was always a personal relationship first. And the most important thing of what you were going to do with a person was personal, not political. The political development came from that background, and from the reading I did’.” (Ibid. 27) In this way, Keniston’s *Young Radicals* presented the young U.S. radicals as questing to locate ““different way of relating to people”” that reflected their moral commitments and desires to be “part of a meaningful group” (Keniston *YR* 29, 32).

Contrary to theories that such young activists totally rejected and disrespected society, tradition, or their personal histories, Keniston argued that their “view of radicalism [w]as an outgrowth of the core values of the[ir] past” (35). He thus underscored the “sense of continuity most of them feel with their pasts,” which has disciplinary purchase in terms of theories that accounted for youth radicalism by the “red diaper baby hypothesis” (the argument that radicals came from Communist or Old Left upbringings) or by inter-family conflict (35). Keniston argued that his findings suggested that social values adopted in early family life—coupled with a fluid, open attitude toward their personal futures that was fixed in disavowal of middle-class lifestyle and also tied to past experience—motivated the radicals' search for alternative belief systems and futures (35). In this way, Keniston also rejected the argument that U.S. youth unrest was tied to 'permissive' parenting; instead, he found youth activists to come from principled backgrounds from across the political spectrum (“Radicals Revisited” 278). Undertaking a complex negotiation of their pasts while looking for new forms to give shape to their futures, these young radicals shared an upbringing in the importance of strong values.

Keniston supported this reading not only with Erikson's work on identity but also the theories of moral development advanced by Lawrence Kohlberg, whose work was in turn an elaboration of the genetic epistemology of Jean Piaget. Keniston argued that the form of moral reasoning development tracked by Kohlberg's model occurred primarily during youth. Kohlberg's developmental model was a spectrum of six stages, the "highest" of which demonstrated "principled moral reasoning organized around abstract concepts of equity, universality, and justice" (Keniston "Moral Reasoning" 110). Based on studies that evaluated answers to questions about hypothetical moral dilemmas that were evaluated not according to content but logical structure, Kohlberg's model proceeded from egocentric particularistic values toward universalism and inclusive justice—which were presented as the highest forms of moral thought. Individuals began in "pre-moral" or "preconventional" stages of moral reasoning, characterized by "instrumental-thinking," in which "questions of right and wrong are answered only in terms of personal need and satisfaction" and "[r]eciprocity is conceived only in terms of the equal exchange of favors or blows relative to everyone's getting his own share" and progressed through "conventional stages" associated with "conception of morality as conformity to conventional role expectations" and moral evaluations that "apply stereotypes of virtue, of goodness or of niceness... and the requirements of law and order" to finally reach stages of moral reasoning exhibiting a "more flexible, autonomous, and nonabsolutistic approach to moral reasoning... amendable if change is needed to serve more adequately the good of the community" (Keniston "Moral Reasoning" 110-11). The sixth and final developmental stage was characterized by "its universalism, its insistence on the inclusiveness of all moral formulations,

and, hence, its ultimate concern with the issue of justice” (Ibid. 111).<sup>30</sup> With each stage understood “to be more adequate at resolving moral questions left problematic by the concepts of preceding stages,” the model's championing of inclusive but “impartial justice [had] ties to the rationalistic ethical tradition of Kant” and clearly exhibited a liberal ethical framework in which morality was equated with justice (Keniston “Moral Reasoning” 118, Locke, “A Psychologist among the Philosophers” 29).

Yet because the questioning of conventional moral judgments was framed by the model as evidence of high moral reasoning, both Keniston and Kohlberg were able to argue that the model was only “tied to political ideology in that [ideology] partly determines the terms in which politics is understood,” since “structures of moral reasoning limit the available concepts which different individuals bring to the same political events” (Keniston "Moral Reasoning" 118). The widespread “psychodynamics of anticonservatism today," Keniston argued, "seem to parallel the quest for moral structures more adequate than law-and-order reasoning”—which meant that the activism of the young radicals was solidly situated at the advanced end of the moral reasoning spectrum. Yet in different historical contexts, “we would still expect preconventional and postconventional subjects to be the most critical of conventional wisdom” and to be searching for more universally inclusive values, but this commitment might not be expressed politically in the same way (Ibid. 118).

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<sup>30</sup> This model has been contested. For instance, Krebs and Denton argue that “In place of the assumption that people are more or less moral (on the basis of their stage of moral development), the evidence suggests that virtually all adults may make high- or low-stage moral judgments when faced with strong triggers, though people may have different thresholds for the activation of different forms of moral reasoning. In contrast to Kohlberg’s assumption that all moral dilemmas are interpreted in one way by people at one stage of moral development and in other ways by people at other stages of moral development, evidence from our research established that the ways in which people process moral information stem from an interaction between the mental structures they have acquired and the content of the moral dilemmas they encounter” (Krebs and Denton 634).

Keniston used Kohlberg's model to argue that that the young U.S. radicals manifested above-average moral reasoning ability, since they were motivated by "extension of principles like equality, equal opportunity, and fair protection of the law to all groups within the society" and this required postconventional thinking about social good (Keniston "Sources of Student Dissent" 126). This reading moreover presented the politics of the "young radicals" as a through-line with establishment liberalism, as it rested upon the subtext that such activism reflected continued development and flourishing of the ideals underwriting democracy. By 1968 when *Young Radicals* was published, this claim for continuity was a polemical refutation of the positions of Cold War liberals convinced that mass youth movements were nothing other than the newest incarnation of "closed-minded ideologues" threatening the very social institutions, like the university, that they believed fostered broadmindedness and autonomy (Geary 625).

Looking internationally, Lifton instead premised his accounts of the historical period's youth on his study in the late 1950s on ideology, brainwashing, and totalism in China and on Japanese postwar youth living in the aftermath of atomic devastation. His widely republished "Protean Man," an essay featured in *Partisan Review* in 1968, took the emergence of an international youth movement for granted by framing it as evidence of the era's rise of a "relatively new" personality type that functioned as a shared response to historical dislocation. Such accounts were not unusual in the late 1960s: theorization of a "new person" or "person of tomorrow" was not only still alive and well in the social sciences, where it had been a discursive topic since the early postwar years, but also appeared in other disciplines as well, including medical ones.<sup>31</sup> Lifton's contribution to this discourse, the protean personality: a "psychological

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<sup>31</sup> In Carl Rogers's contribution to this discourse, the 1969 "The Person of Tomorrow", he cites a range of other cultural figures elaborating the same question, including the philanthropist John D. Rockefeller III, microbiologist Rene Dubos, and virologist Jonas Salk, as well as alternative medicine guru Andrew Weil. The spate of figures

style” that was many-sided, mutable, and inclined toward constant change. It manifested as a lifestyle “characterized by interminable exploration and flux, by a self-process capable of relatively easy shifts in belief and identification—a life style that is postmodern and in some ways post-Freudian” (Lifton “Wellfleet” 39). The protean personality looked toward fragmentary images and multiple identifications to help represent its flux in emotions and the changeability of its beliefs—which meant it was resistant toward totalizing ideas and ideology—but it was fundamentally motivated by hunger for symbolic cultural traditions related to family, idea systems, and the life cycle (Lifton “Young and Old, p. I” 49, Protean Man 21-22, Learning from History 724). Its “constant search for new forms becomes a form in itself” (Lifton “Young and Old, p. I” 52).

“Protean Man” was not universal but it was global; Lifton elaborated the concept using his study of Japanese postwar youth, but he saw it as applicable to other groups who were equally sensitive to, and able to adapt to, the problems posed by the postwar world. The postwar world, he argued, demanded the form of mutability offered by the protean personality, and it also called for a psychological paradigm that shifted away from emphasis on sexuality (Freud) toward theorization of the human relationship to death, since individuals were now forced to confront death in new but collective ways and to try to find meaning in relation to it. Mass genocide and birth of the atomic bomb had altered collective thinking about species survival: over twenty years later, in the late 1960s, “we are still seeing formulations of the significance of this emerge” (“Young and Old pt. I” 47). For Lifton, his generations’ “continuing need to differentiate the

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attending to the question of a new breed of man being evidenced by the 1960s speaks to the continued relevance of the discourse on “the crisis of man” that Mark Greif outlines in *The Age of the Crisis of Man: Thought and Fiction in American 1933-1973*, though Greif essentially paints the 1960s as a period of the decline of this discourse and its transformation into the identity politics.

pre-Hiroshima world we knew from the world of nuclear weapons in which we now live” was different than the younger postwar generation’s response to the nuclear threat, since they had always lived in a nuclear world (Ibid. 48). Yet both reflected a “‘psycho-historical dislocation,’ the loss or the breakdown—or partial breakdown—of simple systems around religion, authority, education, family, all the major areas in life,” compelling new forms of confrontation with “the imagery of extinction” posed by the nuclear threat and rapid technological development, both of which threatened concepts of human life; this process was taken up and extended by a “mass media revolution” that inundated individuals with new symbolic possibilities, and thus fundamentally altered the self’s ability to think about the future (Lifton “Learning From History” 725).

This designifying and resignifying of time imagery reorganized the ways that time was experienced. Indeed, inhabiting an era characterized by “the devitalization, or symbolic death, of forms and images defining the world view and life patterns of large numbers of people,” individuals in the 1960s were less motivated by repression than the question of immortality (Lifton “Intro to Life of the Self” 19, Lifton “Young and Old, p. I” 47). Conceiving the self as a process of experimentation, one in which the right eye looked toward the new while the left aimed toward the past, the protean personality functioned as a form of immortality: a constant death and rebirth of the self. In this sense the protean personality was “very much a historical concept as well as a psychological one...a modus vivendi for our time”—yet, Lifton argued, “something like the protean self has appeared at any moment of rapid historical change, whether it be the Enlightenment or the Meiji Restoration of the late 19th-century Japan” (Lifton

“Learning from History” 725). Any “rebirth” on a mass scale would necessarily be preceded by collective experience of death and destruction (“Protean Man” 27).

Emergence of the protean personality not only indexed the need for a new psychological subject premised in death and immortality, it also called for a new theorization of the relationship between self and social change (“Young and Old I” 48). Lifton maintained that historically it was always the young who most clearly manifested the potential inherent to the protean self, and above all white, middle-class, educated youth—but he believed these protean young people exemplified themes to some extent shared by everyone inhabiting the historical epoch (Ibid. 48-49). For Lifton the changeability of this personality indexed its fundamental functionality; it was adaptive, rather than pathological (“Protean Man” 17-18). This meant it represented the potential for the human psyche to evolve in relation to changed historical conditions. The protean self’s “insistence on continuous psychic recreation of the self” and “continuous historical motion” also made it inclined toward rebellion and revolution—political forms whose future-oriented transformations indexed immortality and historical continuity through a “transformationist myth of making all things new” (“Young and Old pt. I” 50, 52, “Young and Old pt. II” 85). The 1960s international youth rebellion, Lifton argued, thus should be understood as “a *revolution of forms*...a quest for images of rebirth which assert feelings of connection and reestablish the sense of immortality” and as “a *process revolution*...in which active rebelling both expresses and creates the basic images of rebellion” (“Young and Old pt. I” 52).<sup>32</sup> It manifested the protean personality’s penchant for innovation and ability to foster change.

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<sup>32</sup> Lifton detailed revolution as “a quest for a symbolic form of immortality, a means of eternalizing” in his 1968 book on the Chinese Cultural Revolution: *Revolutionary Immortality*.

In retrospect, it is easy to identify the protean personality as “in keeping with what others have come to see as a self which is less fixed, less stable”—a version of the fractured, postmodern self (Lifton “Learning from History” 725). In 1968, however, the stakes of Lifton’s theory were perhaps more clearly understood in terms of normalizing the international New Left: framing them as responding to historical dislocation in a fundamentally natural and healthy way that reflected desire for “contributing to embryonic social forms” (“Young and Old pt. II” 87). Lifton’s analysis of the New Left was not without criticism—he worried about their romanticism and “generational totalism” with respect to those over 30—but it was also largely optimistic (Ibid. 85). His 1968 writings about “protean man” used young people, especially the international New Left, to outline the universalizability of this form of self pluralism and its capacity to render constant change stable. In fact, Lifton places the burden on older generations to identify the protean personality as a form of subjectivity that would become increasingly prevalent in subsequent decades, resist their antiprotean reactions to the New Left, and work to bridge the generation gap so that they could work together *with* young people (Ibid. 88).

Keniston’s and Lifton’s notably sympathetic mobilization of 1960s youth as a case study for their work went hand-in-hand with an explicitness about their political orientations and concern with the problems being investigated. Their readings of the young became a serious point of contention for many peers, including their former mentor Riesman, whose method of character analysis and “ideas about how to achieve autonomous personalities in a post-scarcity society” had certainly informed their research (Geary 605).<sup>33</sup> While Keniston’s work

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<sup>33</sup> Many leftist thinkers differentiated themselves politically in relation to their conceptions of such youth. Riesman, for instance, who began the 1960s a New Left sympathizer changed his outlook after the Berkeley Free Speech Movement and the rise of New Left concerns he deemed more radical, violent and destabilizing and less aligned with his own commitment to nuclear disarmament; Abraham Maslow too, despite bequeathing the concept of self-actualization so important to the New Left and the counterculture, “denounced student leftists, including his own

demonstrated that the period's new young activists exhibited precisely the type of autonomous personalities and skepticism of conformism that Riesman had championed in *The Lonely Crowd*, Lifton's "protean man" manifested the flexibility and creativity Riesman idealized (Ibid. 628).<sup>34</sup> (Though Riesman did assign Keniston's *Young Radicals* to his Harvard students, "he warned his class to be skeptical 'about Keniston's interpretation of the psychological openness and humaneness of some of the young radicals'" – a reading of New Leftism about which Riesman and many of his colleagues were highly unconvinced [Ibid. 628]). Keniston's work moreover proffered a narrative of continuity between the Old and New Lefts that attempted to unite them and also valorized the young radicals for performing a form of more-evolved moral reasoning and innovative social organization ("Youth: New Stage" 653). Given the "enormous *instabilities* and gross cultural *discontinuities* that characterize the modern world" and the fact that "[o]lder forms of stability and continuity have *already* been lost," "[t]he only hope is to learn to live without [previous customs]" (Ibid. 652).

The anxiety produced by accounts like Keniston's and Lifton's seems largely tied to liberal social science's gradual models for social change: psychological and societal health were largely tied to models of adjustment and incremental changes tied to the concepts of socialization

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daughter, as the 'Spit-On Daddy Club,' who acted out of immaturity rather than reasoned critique" (Geary 617, 618, 623).

<sup>34</sup> Jamie Cohen-Cole has argued that "what was novel about Keniston's approach was neither its data set nor its analytic frame, nor even the belief that the complexity of modern life led to fracture. It was, quite simply, the tone of his critique that set Keniston apart from his predecessors. Joining him were Herbert Marcuse and C. Wright Mills, who continued the dominant patterns of liberal centrist 1950s social analysis by marking free, autonomous thought as a—if not the—most important goal of social life. But instead of identifying America's special claim to autonomous thinking, they underlined its conformity. Already in 1955 Mills had argued that the autonomous mind was critical for democracy. On his analysis, intellectuals' lack of autonomy meant that 'knowledge does not now have democratic relevance in America'" (Cohen-Cole 219).

I hope that, within the context of the theoretical aims of psychohistory, it becomes clearer that Keniston's approach and analytic frame cannot be so easily be collapsed into the work of Marcuse and Mills, though it was certainly sympathetic to their claims.

and acculturation and the social unit of the family (Keniston Epilogue to *Youth and Dissent*). Keniston and Lifton instead reframed social conflict and mass change as not threatening but historically normal and even necessary. Developmental models of human psychological growth helped them to naturalize openness to change and to therefore call for a rethinking of the relationship between the individual and society. There was also a difference in emphasis between work like Keniston's and Lifton's and scholars who discredited the New Left: sympathetic accounts tended to focus on youth's campus activism, desire for new social forms, and the objectives laid out by their early liberal humanist declarations like the "Port Huron Statement." Violence, insurrection, promiscuity, drug use, and other values difficult to legitimate according to these frameworks were considered the purview of only a small minority and secondary to the positive goals and desires these youth demonstrated.<sup>35</sup> Those like Riesman who were more skeptical were inclined to read such elements as more politically and morally ominous and more constitutive of the movement's core.<sup>36</sup> For the first camp, the New Left represented autonomy, the political potential of dissent, the spontaneous emergence of free associations; these young people were motivated by desire to belong, to be in meaningful relation, and had formed communities organized to fulfill this need and advance shared beliefs. Riesman, on the other hand, argued that Keniston and Lifton were too sympathetic with the position of those they studied, essentially rationalizing their subjects' values without analyzing their mass, conformist, and anti-intellectual undertones.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> "Lifton believed Riesman was focused narrowly on the actions of a minority and missed more positive developments among the majority of young radicals" (Geary 629).

<sup>36</sup> As Daniel Geary points out, by the late 1960s Riesman had abandoned many of his earlier utopian positions (Geary 632).

<sup>37</sup> In this sense, he advances an argument made in more depth by Chiaromonte.

This divergence underscores the extent to which youth behavior, which served as a continuous reference point across 1960s culture, was especially fraught for a 1960's social science concerned with the quality of life questions that the rebellious young were directly addressing. Depending on the scholar who invoked it, the New Left could stand for the possibility of the autonomous personality so desired and the democratic open-mindedness so championed in postwar discourse or the threat of conformism, irrationality, and disorder (Cohen-Cole 226, Geary 621). Emerging from a historically situated U.S. moment that “marked the first time in history that the great majority of young people, including those from 16 to 21, were... agglomerated and segregated in high schools, colleges and universities, in military camps, and in urban ghettos,” the students and activists now often referred to as the U.S. New Left represented an incredibly and increasingly politically heterogeneous group over the course of the decade (“Changing Social Base of the American Student Movement” 61). Discernible and distinct differences developed not just among the plethora of affiliated organizations and orientations but also between their leadership and rank and file. Within this pluralization of what was often referred to as a cohesive movement, however, a historical trajectory did occur: U.S. the New Left originated with a core group of primarily middle-class students, principally located in elite academic institutions, who were associated with the Students for Democratic Society (SDS) and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). This core group gradually magnetized other affiliates representing a wider range of demographics and degrees of political activism, linked more by general cultural values and concerns than political commitment.

Like most scholarly work on current events, 1960s studies of the New Left often suffered from belatedness. By the time scholars were able to finalize their research, their findings were

almost always out of date. Thus, while much of Keniston's and Lifton's analysis resonates with early stages of the New Left—a phase, represented by the Berkeley Free Speech movement of 1964, clearly constituted by a phenomenologically and existentially oriented liberal humanism that was explicitly inspired by the civil rights movement and highly skeptical of existing social values, cultural norms, and political practices—their work did not necessarily seem in touch in 1968, when more radical critiques of imperialism and racism and bitter skepticism of participatory democratic institutions were more widespread (a stage better represented by the 1968 Columbia University uprising) (Wolfe 454).<sup>38</sup> As the more geographically and socially delimited demographics of the early New Left activism swelled to encompass a broader range of groups with the bombing of North Vietnam in 1965, and grew ever more plural and factious afterwards, Keniston's and Lifton's claims perhaps seem overly optimistic or reductionist. (Within a year of the publication of *Young Radicals* and "Protean Man," the New Left would become increasingly fractured thanks to the breakup of the SDS and emergence of the Weather Underground.)

Yet perhaps more than historical belatedness, Lifton's and Keniston's work suffered most notably from a lack of representativeness: like much of the period's social science research, it focused almost exclusively on educated, affluent male youth (in Lifton's case, from many different countries) as its reference point for readings of the period. Despite Lifton's and Keniston's recognition of this limitation, they did not see it as fundamentally complicating of

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<sup>38</sup> Events such as the Democratic National Convention riots and trial of the Chicago 7, ambushes led by the Black Panthers, protests at the University of Wisconsin and the University of North Carolina, and student occupation at Columbia University reflected a pluralization of objectives and desires on the part of this New Left—which was also bringing older activists, such as the Catonsville 7, into its wake.

their findings (Keniston, “Youth, Change and Violence”). As their contemporary, political scientist Alan Wolfe, pointed out in a review of Keniston’s work:

The cause of youth unrest, Keniston hypothesizes, is due to a rapidly expanding, post-scarcity, technological society. Student protest is due to affluence, not deprivation; alienation is caused by people's having too much, not too little. On top of this, there is tremendous change in the society, due to technological advances. The rapidity of change leaves people in a state of turmoil, which causes them to question their society. There is a good deal of “future shock.” And that is about as far as Keniston's analysis goes. The trouble with these notions is that they are incomplete, at best. If these ideas are true, they are true for only a part of the population. At least 20 percent of the American population does not live in conditions of post-scarcity; for them the struggle for food, clothing, and shelter is still a struggle... very little of what he says applies to my students at a predominantly working-class public university on Staten Island. And my students, for better or worse (I think better), are more typical of most students in this country than his.... Keniston's statements on the nature of American society are basically uncritical. This does not mean that he is an apologist for the existing order, for there is much in America that he finds distasteful and there are many places where he sympathizes with student critics quite openly. (Wolfe 453)

Drawing attention to Keniston’s affiliation with the institutions of the U.S. academy, Wolfe underscored Keniston’s establishment ethics: “[h]e has problems with the way the system operates but not with the nature of the system itself. In fact, he often implies that liberal, democratic capitalism is the best kind of polity that one can hope to find in an imperfect world” (Wolfe 453).<sup>39</sup> While Keniston and Lifton saw their scholarly interventions as disciplinary critiques that challenged the priorities of establishment psychology, as well as history, and their

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<sup>39</sup> “Whenever those who shape American educational policy need a liberal voice to balance their conservative instincts, Keniston's voice is usually the one heard. He is a member, for example, of the prestigious Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, whose proposals will probably go a long way toward shaping American higher education in the years to come. He has served as a consultant to projects of the American Council on Education, whose policies are often highly critical of student radicals, and to the Scranton Commission, which proposed methods of handling them. Much of his research... has been funded by the Ford Foundation, which has its own attachment to the present contours of American society. Within these organizations, his is undoubtedly a critical voice, but the fact that he is willing to serve with them (and, in the case of Carnegie, to keep the criticisms which he must have of their proposals to himself) indicates his willingness to work with the more powerful elements of American society. At the same time, Keniston also wishes to make it clear that he sympathizes with student radicals, at least some of them. But he is above all moderate. This means that when he goes out on a limb and says something favorable toward critical students, he almost instinctively reverses himself in the next sentence. They really are wonderful people, but sometimes, of course, they go too far...” (Wolfe 454).

readings of the New Left as challenges to the rhetoric of establishment liberals, the pillars upon which their work rested were assumptions about the nature of U.S. society and the value of humanism that were still highly informed by how Cold War cultural politics played out in the U.S. academy. Their qualitative liberalism did little to recognize the personal experience of those who did not inhabit the experiential space of affluent and educated white males—a failing that would become increasingly apparent as the 1960s decade came to a close.

### **Conclusion: The Politics of Personality and the New Psychological Subject**

By considering the static, bounded nature of the Cartesian subject a sign of ill-health, Rogers, Keniston, and Lifton participated in a process of normalizing and validating adult psychological growth that was key to the Cold War politics of personality's concerns about conformity and mass ideology and also opened up discursive space for the fractured postmodern subject's instability to emerge. Yet framing the high-functioning subject as a self in a process and the transformations of the postwar world as conducive to psychic health was not the same thing as advancing a proto-postmodern personhood. Rogers, Keniston, and Lifton remained committed to "congruence": the self's ability to construct intelligible narratives of continuity among individual and collective pasts, present experience, and thoughts about the future. Their destabilizing of the psychological subject and shift toward intersubjectivity was a form of rejecting social determinism while remaining outside the limitations of psychological individualism in a historical moment that saw the rise of some of that individualism's most heightened forms championed as self-actualization, creative self-expression, and transcendence. Locating the most meaningful forms of unity or coherence in the intersubjectively constituted self, Rogers, Keniston, and Lifton mobilized psychology as a psychic structure experienced

particularly by each human being but also universally shared; psychology thus became a means for establishing a personalist ethics that would be both extendable and flexible. Their interest in the excavating the personal as a shared psychic space situate the politics of personality advanced by Rogers, Keniston, and Lifton as a personalist complication to the psychohistoricism underwriting the paradigm of the modern/postmodern split.

## Chapter Four.

### Personalizing ‘The Personal is Political’:

Joyce Carol Oates, Toni Cade Bambara, and the Problem of Collective Identity

This dissertation has traced “the rise of personal life” as a locus of political subjectivity in the U.S. postwar and long 1960s, outlining how the emergence of the personal as a field of action intertwined with conceptual and practical revisions of belonging, identity, and political engagement that traversed various discursive registers and class formations (Zaretsky 329). Earlier chapters explored the emergence of the personal as a reference point for intervening in conversations organizing the spheres of aesthetic and cultural criticism, religious practice, and social science in the U.S., highlighting that the personal was both a particular philosophy—an *ism* underpinning a Christian religious orientation that posited a personal God—as well as a vernacular object of negotiation that dovetailed with the migration of psychological concerns into the language of everyday life for an expanding post-WWII middle class, and which was entwined with collective metaphysical anxieties about a crisis of social experience. Taken up as a site for reshaping collective desires and anxieties, the personal serves as a through-line across varying clusters of mid-twentieth century U.S. political communities and movements that claimed social life as a site of political significance by reimagining subjectivity in terms of everyday practices that held profound symbolic meaning.

Yet the slogan now famously associated with this long rise of the personal as an object of political concern, “The Personal is Political,” itself was not coined until the late 1960s with the emergence of early U.S. second-wave feminism. Indeed, our prevailing image of personal politics today is distinctly gendered feminine, tied to the politics of the bedroom and the body that came to national attention through the women’s liberation movement that roughly spanned from 1968-1980. The slogan entered public discourse through the title of a 1969 feminist essay

by Carol Hanisch, which circulated widely thanks to its publication in Shulamith Firestone's and Anne Koedt's *Notes From the Second Year* (these editors in fact gave Hanisch's essay its famous name) (Hanisch website). The slogan arose from early second-wave feminist debates over whether the small groups of women coming together to "share the growing knowledge that they were not alone" and reflect on their personal experiences, known as consciousness-raising (CR) groups, were 'merely' practicing therapy or were engaging in "therapy and politics" (Evans 215, Hanisch "Personal is Political"). Born out of contestation over what constituted the political field, the slogan grew synonymous with the increasing turn toward personal life as the grounds for thinking political change in the late 1960s and early 1970s U.S. The feminist 'personal is political' advanced the idea that with transformation of "the power dynamics of personal life... everything else—law, politics, education, work, marriage—would follow" (Stansell 232). As Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* explained, feminism's intervention was to advance "a theory of politics which treats power relationships on grounds less conventional than those to which we are accustomed," by addressing them "on grounds of personal contact and interaction between members of well-defined and coherent groups: races, castes, classes, and sexes" who lacked "representation in a number of recognized political structures" (Millet 24). In this sense, early second-wave feminism participated in a retheorization of politics around identity that also characterized a range of political groups spanning the black liberation, gay rights, and Chicano movements and which we now collect under the umbrella of 'identity politics'.

Maintaining that "[t]here are no personal solutions...only collective action for a collective solution," the force behind the feminist 'personal is political' lay in the claim that gender inequality extended beyond formal political equality: it was a structural social issue that played out at the level of the intimate but was not reducible to the lives of particular individuals (Lee

167). In this sense, the slogan signaled a personalist turn to daily life and personal relationships as the site for enacting political engagement. Feminist consciousness raising was itself a personalist practice: taking place within small groups, consciousness raising involved a process of sharing individual feelings and experiences and linking them to those of others and to larger social forces that recontextualized individual accounts of suffering into a narrative of shared experience.<sup>1</sup> CR groups theorized self-actualization as becoming conscious of one's membership in an oppressed collectivity and as developing the ability to perceive and live out one's daily interactions and relationships in terms of that membership. In this sense, they mobilized the encounter group model advanced by Rogers, which framed individual growth as a product of the relational context provided by the group, but situated the work of the group in relation to a larger collective identity unified by its shared struggle. As Pamela Allen's *Free Space*, an early feminist handbook on consciousness raising, demonstrates, the work of "opening up, sharing, analyzing and abstracting" that the CR process entailed was framed as a means for trying "to separate ourselves from dependence on male values and institutions" while trying "to resist the temptation to submerge our individuality within the group" (Allen 6). In this sense, it enacted a personalist process of acknowledging and valorizing personal thoughts and feelings that located autonomy in creation of a shared interpersonal space.

Yet the goal of CR groups was "developing an ideology" or program that would mobilize and scale increased collective consciousness into an organized movement (Allen 7). The methods of turning practices like consciousness raising into a politics performable at a mass scale did not always align as easily with personalist commitments as the work that unfolded within individual CR groups. Indeed, the relationship between feminism as an expression of

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<sup>1</sup> See *Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader* edited by Barbara A. Crow for early second-wave texts on how CR groups were conducted and theorized.

identity politics and personalism is in fact revealing of the overlapping but distinct approaches of each: personalism, for instance, was just as interested in personalizing the political as it was in demonstrating that the personal was always already political, while the conception of identity operative in identity politics was political before it was personal. Untangling these discrepancies is useful but difficult, considering that early second-wave feminism is more appropriately understood as a set of feminisms, since it was composed of many groups with differing agendas and tactics that were often implicitly or explicitly organized around particular ideological approaches. The ideological differences between the radical and reform feminist camps, and among groups within each of these camps, reflected the considerable “competition within the social movement sector of the 1960s and early 1970s” and was often a determinant in group belonging (Roth 213).<sup>2 3</sup>

This group differentiation impulse characterizing much of the early second-wave movement was tied to its development out of the “parent” leftist movements of Civil Rights and the New Left, which helped establish its conditions for emergence not only because they provided crucial training, networks, and communication resources to women, many of whom were new political actors, but also because U.S. feminisms were born through fracture with these earlier progressive movements (Roth 51). Many white feminists left other progressive organizations to form alternative groups organized more specifically around women’s needs (Roth 57). Emerging in dialogue with parent leftist organizations whose causes they believed in but whose patriarchal practices seemed to belie those ideals, feminist groups developed out of

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<sup>2</sup> “Reform-versus-revolution, as a question of possibility and invention, characterizes the stakes of early second-wave feminist debates,” which were animated by questions about what kind of movement to build and the degree to which “woman” should function as an essentialist and separatist category within it (Armstrong 17).

<sup>3</sup> See also, Christine Stansell, *The Feminist Promise: 1972 to Today* and Elizabeth Armstrong, *The Retreat From Organization: U.S. Feminism Reconceptualized*, as well first-hand accounts of activists.

need to distinguish and legitimize their claims and objectives. While these groups shared a collective experience of patriarchal oppression as an alternative point around which to organize politically, exactly which political tactics, stances, and affiliations were considered valid or appropriate was hotly contested among groups and between camps.

Black U.S. feminisms emerged differently: not through a break with other leftist organizations or white women's liberation so much as out of disagreement with discourses within the black community about the role of women and a wider national debate about the black family with policy-level implications.<sup>4</sup> For these women, the race-based premise of black liberation politics exacerbated and overshadowed other issues experienced by women, producing what was often framed as the dilemma of choosing between two identities: one's blackness or one's womanhood.<sup>5</sup> While there were certainly notable subdivisions within these generic racial categorizations, this schematic historical narrative is useful for distinguishing among the different ways identity was politicized by early second-wave feminists.

What feminist identity politics shared, however, was a mobilization of a conception of identity that was built upon the ideas about the ego and its actualization advanced by the psychologists and sociologists of the previous chapter but framed them as sites of political contest. The identity of identity politics was de-privatized, understood not in terms of the individual's psyche and its attempts to make itself coherent but objectively constituted by the social and biological conditions shaping how that individual was defined by others (Man Ling Lee *Personal is Political*). In this sense, identity was external, or political, before it was internal,

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<sup>4</sup> See Benita Roth's *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America's Second Wave*.

<sup>5</sup> For more detailed accounts of these histories see Roth, as well as *Daring to Be Bad* by Alice Echols, *The Retreat from Organization: U.S. Feminism Reconceptualized* by Elizabeth Armstrong, "The Personal is Political" by Teresa Man Ling Lee in the *Blackwell Encyclopedia on Gender*, and *The Trouble Between Us: An Uneasy History of White and Black Women in the Feminist Movement* by Winifred Breines.

or personal, and it was experienced as a barrier to social and political belonging. The objective of feminism became to transform this experience of non-sovereignty, of ‘being defined,’ into an opportunity for self-definition associated with actualization and liberation, so that what had once been a liability would instead become a point of empowerment. In the words of Audre Lorde, “if we do not define ourselves for ourselves, we will be defined by others—for their use and to our detriment” (Lorde 20). The work of identity politics was to turn “what was supposedly inferior” about marginalized groups of the population into the source of “what was positive, if not superior” about these identities: a “proud assertion of difference” that personally and communally reconceived sites of oppression as affordances (Nicholson 2). As identity-based groups took personally the ways their experience was disavowed by sex, class, and race formations, what had been seen as personal characteristics became the political bases for a redefined sense of belonging.

In its concern over and response to the events of the Second World War, personalism, while not without its own ideological content, occupied a skeptical stance toward ideology, especially when wielded as a determinant of group membership.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, while the multiplicity of groups characterizing the feminist movement modeled a discursive organizational form championed by several personalists, personalists were inclined to be wary of the fractious and sectarian nature of early second-wave feminist politics or its embrace of ideological program as a political tool. Moreover, while the rhetoric of early second-wave reform feminism espoused by figures like Betty Friedan, for instance, emerged from the same discourse world as personalism

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<sup>6</sup> It is worth noting that Day’s Catholic Worker did promote a Catholic, though no institutionally so, ethos within the CW organization but religion did not play a role in deciding the individuals they provided support or services to. King mobilized Christianity in his framework of the Beloved Community but religion was not the basis of belonging to that community. The New Left’s ideological stance on the Old Left and ethos of ‘ageism’ were also main points of contention for the personalism of Macdonald, Chiaromonte, and Keniston.

and took as a given the tenets about loneliness and alienation underwriting the broken world thesis but situated them within a feminist paradigm,<sup>7</sup> feminists tended to be materialist not metaphysical and took up a different stance on transcendence. Feminists shared Day's and King's approach to oppression as a basis for community, for example, but did not frame suffering as the catalyst for transformation of self and world—and thus did not see it as ethically significant. Suffering was something to be liberated from in the feminist framework, not something inherently liberating. Likewise, King's nonviolent rhetoric of loving the oppressor strikes a very different tone than the one advanced by most of the period's feminists, who had been told to love their oppressors for a long time and viewed such love as a site of their subjugation.

Feminist identity politics were also distinct from the form of social justice espoused by the early U.S. New Left, in that they were premised upon an “ethos of organizing around one's own oppression,” not another's, that hinged on the “idea that the most authentic and, therefore, most radical forms of activism involved fighting one's own oppression” (Roth 202.).<sup>8</sup> “We believe that the most profound and potentially most radical politics come directly out of our own identity,” the black feminist Combahee River Collective famously wrote.

In the case of Black women this is [considered] a particularly repugnant, dangerous, threatening, and therefore revolutionary concept because it is obvious from looking at all the political movements that have preceded us that anyone is [considered] more worthy of liberation than ourselves. (Combahee River Statement).

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<sup>7</sup> For an account of Friedan's work as a journalist and her relationship to midcentury antifascism and radicalism that put her in touch with the vocabulary of the commentary class, see *Betty Friedan And The Making of The Feminine Mystique: The American Left, The Cold War, And Modern Feminism* by Daniel Horowitz.

<sup>8</sup> The origins of this political trend is generally located in “a series of events in the Black movement; in this view, its watershed moment is the decision by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) to ask white activists to leave and go into their own communities to address racism there” (Roth 202).

The work of taking responsibility for one's own liberation that such a claim indexed certainly aligned with personalist commitments but the forms of exclusion its practice implied were at odds with the impulse toward unity and consensus motivating personalism. The various forms of differentiation animating feminism as a politics of reclaiming difference challenged the ways that personalism, though it too turned to personal life, did so chiefly to articulate a politics of unity, or sameness.

This chapter takes up two personalist women fiction writers who help elaborate the relationship between personalism and the feminist 'personal is political.' Joyce Carol Oates and Toni Cade Bambara interrogated the relay between identity and ideology in the late 1960s and early 1970s, using the short story as a medium for exploring themes in dialogue with both early U.S. second-wave feminists and the personalist figures traced throughout this dissertation. Oates, for instance, took aim at the ideology of romance that saturated the socialization of women with a politics of personhood premised in passion. Bambara instead challenged the ideologies of Black Power and liberal welfares statism she saw organizing black communities as destructive of the more personalist politics already unfolding in these spaces. The pairing of Oates's and Bambara's short fiction is a strange one in the sense that Oates is rarely read as a political or feminist writer, and Bambara's short fiction, explicitly political, gets far less critical attention than her later novels.<sup>9</sup> Oates is not always easy to as 'feminist,' and Bambara, though decidedly so, has never received the stature of other contemporaneous black women writers—or of Oates herself. Yet positioning Oates's and Bambara's short fiction against essays, anthologies, and criticism produced by early U.S. second-wave feminists of their period, including *Notes from the*

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<sup>9</sup> Gayle Greene, for instance, has argued that Oates is far from a feminist. See *Changing the Story: Feminist Fiction and the Tradition*.

*Second Year* and *The Black Woman*, which Bambara edited, helps to situate several key feminist issues in relation to the concerns of this dissertation.

Oates's short fiction from the late 1960s and early 1970s was highly sensitive to the "violence at the heart of intimate experiences" and the ways women were "caught between the desire of their lovers, the demands of their social roles, [and] others' random expectations" of them, facing the challenge "to define their inner selves in any other terms than the merely external" (Waller 40, 44, 31).<sup>10</sup> Her stories dramatize the struggle between social determinism and autonomy, as women fight with "their outside environment but [are] also stultified, trapped inside themselves" to such an extent that they have difficulty engaging in healthy or fulfilling relationships with others (Ibid. 44). She depicts a world in which experiences of romance, home, and gender are determined by power dynamics, social conventions, and fantasies that circumscribe the lives and available modes of sense-making for primarily young white women from a range of social classes. This plays out noticeably in Oates's stories of love, which echo many of the critiques of heterosexual romantic thought advanced by early second-wave feminists. Oates thus addresses a different type of love than Day and King, but she situates it in a world that like theirs is lonely and atomistic—though for different reasons. Indeed, Oates firmly positions herself within the broken world discourse by questioning the possibility of meaningful relation in a landscape of social crisis, where sociality looks like battles among Cartesian egos and with abstract forces that lead to social disconnection and warped personalities. Thus tracking a question long resonant for U.S. postwar personalists—is the world too broken for politics?—Oates's work searches for alternative expressions of heterosexual love that might allow the

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<sup>10</sup> For an account of the prevalence of violence as a motif for women writers in the period, see Mary Eagleton's contribution to *The Oxford History of the Novel in English*, "The Feminist Novel."

individual to locate “meaning beyond the self” without participating in patterns of self-destruction (qtd. in Clemons 75).

Bambara’s work instead highlights how the prevailing ideologies of liberal welfare statism and black nationalism, currents of thought with considerable purchase in the progressive politics of the late 1960s and early 1970s U.S., were founded on conceptions of collectivity that destroyed the practices of belonging and solidarity possible within everyday black life. Whereas Oates’s work is haunted by a lack of meaningful forms of collectivity, Bambara’s instead emphasizes the risk attached to mass politics when they advance a vision of the collective so strong it overpowers the person. Her short fiction questions the forms of political action offered by both models of racial uplift to show how “process, memory, and struggle [might] replace the fantasy of a common culture realized as a little nation,” which underpinned black nationalism, and frames “the daily practice of freedom” as “the grounds for sovereignty and for a labor of love,” not institutions (Avery 192, 204). In this sense, Bambara shared King’s emphasis on work, process, and inclusive community positions everyday practices and interpersonal relationships against a version of identity politics in which ideology collapses ends and means and elides the experiences of those not aligned with its vision. Bambara’s account of black nationhood instead promotes a vision of social unity able to recognize difference—one that can perhaps best be understood as an attempt to personalize identity politics.

**“Love, like war, is a continuation of politics by other means”:  
Romance and Relationality in Joyce Carol Oates’s Early Short Fiction<sup>11</sup>**

Oates’s work is often considered so close to the pulse of its times that Henry Louis Gates Jr. has noted that a “future archeologist equipped with her oeuvre could easily piece together the

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<sup>11</sup> “Hot and Cold Flashes,” Kathie Sarachild, *Notes from the Third Year*.

whole of postwar America” (qtd. in *Sexual Politics* 84). Perhaps more aligned with Oates’s own vision, James R. Giles has called her “a writer of contemporary spiritual history” (Giles 58). Indeed, Oates’s essays from the early 1970s make it clear that she saw herself contributing to an “absolutely honest literature,” one which “dramatizes for us the complexities of this epoch, showing us how deeply related we are to one another, how deeply we act out, even in our apparently secret dreams, the communal crises of our world” (Oates “New Heaven and Earth” 54). The “spiritual history” presented by Oates’s early short fiction collections *The Wheel of Love and Other Stories*, *Marriages and Infidelities*, and *Goddesses and Other Women*, which all date to both the period of early second-wave feminism and the high-moment of American literary self-reflexivity, negotiated “the communal crises of our world” in relation to the realism of the midcentury middlebrow and the era’s fascination with metafiction and intertextuality. Often intended to add a female literary voice to the canon, her retellings of classic stories refigure and borrow from canonical male writers like James Joyce, Franz Kafka, Anton Chekov, and Henry James to participate in the collective project of literary production (Giles 75). “When I write...I don’t feel that I am any particular person, with a particular ego”; instead, “I seem to share, however vaguely, in the ‘tradition’,” the writerly community (Bellamy 66).

While Oates’s criticism and essays from the early 1970s assert community as an operative concept in her work, scenes of communal gatherings or collectivity are few and far between in her early stories, which are peopled with characters lacking many resources for moving beyond their own sense of isolation and atomism. In this sense, many of Oates’s early short stories are consciously tragic, in that Oates maintained “tragedy grows out of a break between self and community, a sense of isolation” (Oates Intro *Edge of Impossibility* 3). Oates’s concern with the “break” between self and community and with locating “meaning beyond the

self” is what perhaps most solidly positions her within the tradition of personalists investigating a similar line of social rupture (qtd. in Clemons 75). Indeed, Oates understood her work to be offering “complex propositions about the nature of personality and its relationship to a specific culture (contemporary America)” —which was described in crisis-of-experience language as a place undergoing a “quest for meaning, for significance” tied to the breakup of old social forms (Dreaming America 29; Oates “New Heaven and Earth” 53, “Myth of the Isolated Artist” 75). In her acceptance speech for the National Book Award, for instance, Oates explained her writing as an attempt “to give a shape to certain obsessions of mid-century Americans: a confusion of love and money, of the categories of public and private experience, of a demonic urge I sense all around me, an urge to violence as the answer to all problems” (Oates “National Book Award Speech”).

For Oates, accounting for the relationship between self and society in the contemporary U.S. meant writing “not only about the feeling of a search for meaning itself, but what it feels like to feel that search as a constant, infinitely detailed and surprising experience” (Oates “Dreaming America” 30). Her “propositions about the nature of personality” excavated the continued hold of the “romance of the ego”: the “myth of separate and competitive selves” and “of personal autonomy” (Bender 392; Oates “New Heaven and Earth” 59; Oates “Myth of the Isolated Artist” 75). Oates presents this model of subjectivity—premised in mastery, “subduing or obliterating...natural instincts, leaving nothing to be unknown, uninvestigated”—as the fundamentally flawed American ideal offered to all citizens regardless of whether they were an “industrialist or a ‘disinterested’ scientist or a literary man” (Oates “New Heaven and Earth” 53). Oates framed her work as a form of narratively documenting the fact that “[i]n many of us the Renaissance ideal is still powerful, its voice tyrannical... This voice tells us that we are not quite

omnipotent but must act as if we were” (Ibid. 53). The American landscape she depicts is full of damaged and fragile selves clutching at this broken mythology despite experiencing the power of the ego as overbearing. “[T]he flowing forth of passion,” overwhelming feeling, especially romantic feeling, becomes for Oates’s characters a way of eschewing the pressure of the tyrannical I. Overwhelming feeling in fact becomes a stand-in for relationality that seems to overcome autonomy and isolation but actually perpetuates the violence inherent to the Cartesian dream of mastery (Oates “Intro Edge of Impossibility” 7, “Myth of the Isolated Artist” 75).

The women in Oates’s early short fiction collections are a case in point. Her early stories prominently feature the isolation of lower- and middle-class white women whose lives are underwritten with emotional and economic dependence, violence, loneliness, and resentment.<sup>12</sup> Types and motifs transverse Oates’s early stories to establish this isolation as a shared experience, even if the communal nature of their fantasies, fears, and frustrations is not something of which Oates’s women are entirely conscious. Oates can hardly be read as a militant feminist. Her 1973 novel *Do With Me What You Will*, one of the few to take up consciousness raising or women’s liberation as its central subjects, is not well-remembered, and most of her fiction from the high period of early U.S. second-wave feminism presents few models of positive female relationships, transformation, growth, or empowerment. Yet her stories do intersect themes commonly taken up by early second-wave texts: the objectification of women, the interiorization of damaging value systems, the power differentials within heterosexual relationships. In Oates’s early fiction, women are continually falling prey to male manipulation and violence; they are raped, pimped, and used by men who often appear interchangeable within

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<sup>12</sup> Friedan’s dissatisfied and unfulfilled housewife, plagued by the “problem without a name,” for instance, plays a recurring role in Oates’s short stories of the period, who perform the affective labor of feeding, shopping, and caring for the men in their lives without much emotion and whom readers often encounter amidst extramarital affairs, attempting to bring meaning and excitement to their lives through illicit love.

and across stories, but they also feel desire for their oppressors and are enchanted by the idea of possessive love.<sup>13</sup> These women walk anxiously through parking structures, listening for footsteps behind them; the pleasure men bring to their bodies is vague and impersonal.

Romance thus becomes the leitmotif tying Oates's "propositions" about the "romance of autonomy" and "burden of the ego" to the discourse of early second-wave feminism. Within the horizon of Oates's fictional world, which lacks a communal register or imaginary for belonging, love becomes both the site of oppression and a means for survival: for her female characters, the aspiration of personhood hinges upon a fantasy of protagonism, or the experience of becoming the leading character, in a love story characterized by violent romantic attachment. The social norms and ideology of romance are constitutive of this experience: being a lover, loved, loving, being a mother, a wife, a woman are roles offering social and personal legibility because they belong to the romantic plots long present in women's culture framing possessive love as a feminine ideal. Participants in the consumption and circulation of this ideology, Oates's characters are drawn toward compulsive, irrational, overwhelming, and coercive love that "engender[s] feelings of powerlessness, of being at the mercy of the beloved" but also "holds out the promise of power – of being the loved one" (Jackson 43).

This romantic fantasy reveals faith in what Oates called the "Renaissance ideal" of sovereign agency and stages togetherness as a struggle over "command and control" (Bender 392). It appears across Oates's early stories as an ecstatic form of intimacy marked by the refrain that "one of us must die"—the frequent, desperate thought of women for whom the tension between non-sovereignty and control is both so pleasurable and so unbearable that only the death of one party seems like it could offer relief. While Oates's characters hold up possessive

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<sup>13</sup> See "Four Summers" or "Ordinary Love" for examples of stories where men are perceived as a threat or interchangeable.

romantic attachment as an ideal that also furnishes an identity, their passion also facilitates “proximity to a vague prospect of social belonging via the generic or conventional plot” of the love story fantasy, which serves “as the desired relay from weakness to strength, aloneness to sociability, abandonment to recognition, and solitary agency to reciprocity” (Berlant *Female Complaint* 11). Yet in Oates’s stories this love is realistically experienced as unsustainable and ultimately destructive of self and others, promoting the very disconnectedness it intends to transcend. In that sense, it resembles what Lauren Berlant has identified as “cruel optimism,” attachment to a fantasy imagined to provide security or meaning that in fact becomes an “obstacle to flourishing” (Berlant *CO* 1).

The identity furnished by romantic protagonism, like the bourgeois gender norms producing the conditions for its emergence as an aspiration, is constituted by structural economic, political, and social factors external to the people or situations involved. Oates’s early short fiction suggests it is only outside of these conventional structures that love could shift from a site of oppression to a site, if not of flourishing, at least of survival of “the communal crisis of our world” (Oates “New Heaven and Earth” 54). Highly conscious of the changing panorama of the postwar U.S. and the tensions between class, gender, race, and violence informing psychic life, Oates’s short fiction from this period narrativizes the claims made by radical feminist texts like Firestone’s “Love”<sup>14</sup> and Meredith Tax’s “Woman and Her Mind: The Story of Everyday Life”—both featured in *Notes from the Second Year* in 1970—and the critiques of heterosexual romance made by figures like Millet, Friedan, and Germaine Greer.<sup>15</sup> While feminist discourses on love in this period ranged widely—from espousing celibacy or radical detachment to insisting

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<sup>14</sup> Firestone’s “Love,” which appeared in *Notes from the Second Year*, edited by Firestone and Anne Keodt, is also the sixth chapter of her *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (1970).

<sup>15</sup> See for instance, Kate Millet’s *Sexual Politics*, Germaine Greer’s *The Female Eunuch*, Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*, and Firestone’s *The Dialectic of Sex*.

that women should strive to ‘have it all’ and advocating lesbianism—they were all premised in Simone de Beauvoir’s claim that certain gendered mythologies, especially love, became a means by which women became complicit in their own subjugation (de Beauvoir 301).<sup>16</sup> Oates’s interrogation of postwar disconnection points beyond many of the same limiting social conventions to suggest that while the ideology of romance seems to promise the possibility of being known, it simultaneously forecloses that prospect by framing love as a battle of possession.

Unable to envision an otherwise to their experience, Oates’s women largely remain trapped within the genres societally available to them to make sense of themselves and the world. In this sense, compared to the feminists whose ideas she mobilized, Oates herself seems bound to existing structures and gender formations.<sup>17</sup> Whereas radical feminists like Firestone maintained that feminist transformation of the “sex-caste system” was the only way to free “love to flow unimpeded” by power dynamics, Oates only gestured at the political, economic, and social underpinnings of the romantic fantasy she critiqued—and she ultimately maintains the heterosexual couple as a relational form able to mitigate the burden of the Cartesian ego without collapsing that ego into an other (Firestone *Dialectic* 74). The reparative visions of love that appear in her early collections are ultimately romantic: they offer scenes of being together or being in relation in which the couple form helps facilitate growth or healing.

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<sup>16</sup> References to the work of humanist and existential psychologists like Rogers, Maslow, and Laing and frequent references to literary and cultural imaginaries of love enabled these feminists to examine and reconstruct the psychic workings of this process and its implications for identity and sexual politics. See for instance Greer’s *The Female Eunuch*, which references both Rogers and Maslow in its description of love: “If we could present an attainable ideal of love it would resemble the relationship described by Maslow as existing between self-realizing personalities” and “Rogers said of love is to be believed, that ‘we can love a person only to the extent we are not threatened by him’” (Greer 164). Miranda Tax also relies heavily on R. D. Laing in “Woman and Her Mind.”

<sup>17</sup> For instance, her rewritings of stories by Chekhov, Flaubert, Kafka, Thoreau, Joyce, and Barth in the 1972 collection *Marriages and Infidelities*, pointed revisions of key texts of the male-dominated literary canon, are an essentially limited form of feminist engagement that is inherently dialogic nature: “Oates ‘marries’ the celebrated authors, exploring her kinship with certain features of their work, but she also commits literary infidelities” that subvert the patriarchal model to develop her own sense of belonging to the writerly community (Arujo 105). As the language of ‘marriage’ and ‘infidelities’ shows, this approach does not transform “the inherited structuring of things” so much as oppositionally engage it (Bender 392).

“Extraordinary Popular Delusions” (1972)—whose title is a reference to Charles McKay’s 1841 study of group psychology that attempted to debunk a number of early nineteenth century “delusions”—quickly introduces several of the motifs anchoring Oates’s early work. The story moves between the consciousnesses of Paul and Ann, a suburban Midwestern middle-class married couple, as they live out a single day. Paul is encountered *en route* a visit to his widowed father, mentally preparing to invite him to move-in with Paul’s family. Ann meanwhile moves through her day at home mechanically, barely able to handle quotidian tasks as she thinks obsessively about her lover. The disjunction between the couple’s inner states is sharp: we quickly learn that Paul takes comfort in the idea of his wife but thinks of her impersonally, as a symbol of his place in the world. He is completely unaware of her personal experience: she is depressed, in love with another man, and unable to confront the day, her children, or her responsibilities. Paul works in real estate and is enchanted by the notions of home and family, which seem to offer him a sense of identity and belonging. The notion of family becomes distinctly masculine in this story, as it signals Paul’s virility, agency, and tender but coercive attachment to his wife and family: “he would draw them all together...locked in bonds of love they would never outgrow” (153), “he felt it strongly, so strongly that tears came into his eyes, [at] the thought of his family, his own specific family with himself at the center, a family he had created” (150). This imprisoning love that “locks” his “specific family” to him, and frames them as his property, situates Paul as the patriarch of a world that belongs to him—and thus figures his household as an expression of his authority that contrasts with the experiences of powerlessness and anonymity he meets beyond its walls: “He felt the strangeness of these two things—the barrenness of the expressway and the personal, unique, precious warmth of his own home, which belonged only to him” (149).

Ann, on the other hand, who left college and the prospect of teaching to become Paul's wife, has no such illusions about her family and sometimes finds herself unable to love her children, whom she fears and resents: "I don't love them. I don't know how" (153). Indeed, her relation to her family and domestic duties is experienced as formal and entirely impersonal. Though Ann is offended by her boys' rough, careless demeanors, she herself does not bear much personal feeling toward them. "Why should she love that boy, that curly-haired boy said to be her son? The other two boys were strangers... She did not love them, she was not expected to love them, and why must she love the one who was her son?" (158). This lack of feeling underscores the labor of loving for Ann and her chaffing at the conventions of motherhood. Though Ann performs her maternal and wifely duties, the activities give her nothing in return; ambivalent about her obligations to her own household, she is even less able to feel obligation to anyone beyond it—including her neighbors and the father-in-law Paul is planning to invite to live in their home.

The vague sense of risk that Ann senses in her children, which is entangled in gender, as "their maleness was already a threat about them, it could not be stopped," also hangs about other men in Ann's life, including her husband's father (159). Fitting a generic type, these men establish Ann's impression of an antagonistic relation between the sexes that traverses and constitutes the ethos of many other Oates stories and collections: "Ann hated these sour, knowing male faces, the closeness of their maleness, their secrecy. No woman could penetrate their lives. Stupidly, blindly, they were creatures united in a permanent conspiracy against women, and this conspiracy gave them a certain uncanny strength" (164). Her husband participates in this conspiracy in his governance of the household, which is experienced as a form of condescending benevolence: "Her husband was deluded, sitting at the kitchen table with

her, his partner and his wife, going over the bills and the receipts....so kindly, so loving, bullying her, believing that he was her husband when in reality she had nothing to do with him at all” (165). His relation to her does not seem at all attuned to her experience of herself.

Ann’s lover, Stanford, stands in contrast to this paradigm. A school teacher in Detroit, Stanford undermines male threat with his own failure and vulnerability. Stanford is not hard, virile, or voracious: he does not eat properly, lives in a shambled apartment, and is lonely and unsure. Indeed, Oates’s recurring lover-figure in these early collections is a vulnerable man who exists outside of conventional masculine roles in a state of irresolution or uncertainty—by profession he is often a teacher, writer, or academic, sensitive and intellectual. These men’s ambivalence, transience, and instability is figured as a product of their tenderness and their rejection of social norms. It is also what attracts Oates’s women to them: they too are confused about their sense of self and do not outwardly signify domination or control. In this sense, Stanford seems a double to Ann herself.

Ann and Stanford’s affair unfolds against the backdrop of the long 1960s’ changing urban landscape, staged against “the new FHA map of the city of Detroit that extended the ‘high risk’ areas” (159). Teaching in the inner-city while his more competitive colleagues are begging to “escape” is a sign of Stanford’s unconventionality, his rejection of the versions of masculinity envisioned and inhabited by Paul (165). The movement of black families into new neighborhoods of Detroit and the resulting White Flight that the story indexes creeps at its edges as a source of both excitement and risk (159). These details are not extrinsic to the plot but essential to its atmosphere of fragmentation and segregation, providing a socio-economic scaffolding for the story that contextualizes the material conditions in which the love affair emerges and setting up the tension between suburban middle-class security and urban precarity

characterizing much of Oates's early fiction. The story's geographic setting and historical moment also become reflections on the characters' psychic poverty, as their delusions and entanglements are embedded in the splintering of the local community, Oates's communal crisis of experience, just beyond the story's plot—a social fragmentation that also constitutes the conditions for the affair's very occurrence.

The violent “racial disturbances” in the background of the story resonate not only with the sense of threat Ann perceives just below the surface of her daily life but also compound the excitement of the affair itself, becoming an indication of the violence of repressed passions. Ann “felt with shock that [her lover] was seducing her, unconsciously” with tragic tales about the students in his school, including one of “a cute little girl, a student of his, who was now dead” (167). The violent deaths of young girls figure prominently in Oates's stories, a reminder of how male power underwrites and shapes the quotidian. Attached to the devolving city and uninterested in conventional symbols of the domestic, Stanford is an access point to a different form of experience than the one Ann has previously inhabited—and also represents a different form of love: not the binding familial love represented by Paul but the ecstasy of being moved outside oneself in passion. Ann's love for Stanford becomes “the only meaning to her life...her mind kept circling that fact, numbly” (165). As the center of her inner existence, he comes to structure her entire experience: “She must think of the man she loved, she must think of the center of her life: Stanford, a lonely man, ironic and dissatisfied, with an unimagined future... She must think of him. The world rushed to him, he was the center of the world, she must clutch at him or she would go mad” (155).

In this way, “Extraordinary Popular Delusions” makes explicitly gendered distinctions about the kinds of illusions embraced by its protagonists. If Paul's are built upon his disconnect

from the real thoughts and feelings of his wife and the symbolic weight the fantasy of family unity bears in his self-concept, Ann's revolve around belief that her newfound love for Stanford has changed her and given her life meaning—as though, as Friedan wrote, her “problem was with her husband, or her children, or that what she really needed was to redecorate her house, or move to a better neighborhood, or have an affair, or another baby” (Friedan 20). Instead, Oates intimates that Ann's sense of self, now hinging upon Stanford, just as once it had on her husband, and her illusion of “becoming” a fuller subject through her love affair, are no less damaging or destructive than Paul's illusions of domestic bliss or patronizing inattention.

While Paul considers his home a “personal” refuge, for Ann it is impersonal and stands in contrast with the one thing she experiences as her own: her body—which “was secret and dark and coiled,” a site of meaning and intensity (155). Here the sexual politics of space fall easily along early second-wave lines: Paul experiences his home life as a private domain, described as a subjective space warmly hospitable to his needs and desires, that is protected from the objectivity and anonymity demanded of him by the impersonal outside world (represented in the story by both his job and his father). Paul is not an aggressive or disagreeable man, and yet his ideas of love and family are nonetheless oppressive and influenced by the example of masculinity set by his father. For Ann, the home is instead constituted by the same impersonal relations that Paul finds refuge from in domestic life and by an affective labor tied to interpersonal obligations she does not want or feel capable of fulfilling. She is dependent on her affair to feel she exists or has a purpose, largely because the affair gives her access to “private thoughts” that are separate, hidden, and wholly her own: “*Now I am in love...now I am changed completely...*”—opening a secret inner space that love seems to fill with meaning (159). Yet the only things that Ann identifies as solely her own, her body and her thoughts, are actually dominated by others: her

body is shared by two men, while her thoughts of love are experienced as obsessive, forceful intrusions of her lover into her psyche.

If early second-wave feminism is famous for making the personal political by calling attention to the ways that delusions like Paul's saturated domestic life with imbalanced power and labor relations often disguised by emotion, it also directly challenged Ann's belief that love was somehow an escape from their reach. In "Woman and Her Mind," for instance, Tax traces the inner world of someone who like Ann feels that "I am nothing when I am by myself... I only know I exist because I am needed by someone" (Tax 13). "I used to think that when I married, or when I had a baby, or when I was thirty, then I would come to a stop... be a certain person" Ann confesses to Stanford, bewildered that she has found no certainty, no sense of self, through these acts (163). An important intervention of early second-wave critiques like Tax's was drawing attention to the ways that women habitually blocked out "realization of how we have been emotionally deformed by our socialisation" (Tax 11).<sup>18</sup> In contrast to her "husband [who] goes out into the real world," Tax's "woman," like Ann, assumes she will gain an identity from inhabiting gender roles like wifedom and motherhood (Tax 13). The woman Tax outlines in her essay occupies a socio-economic position similar to Ann, who depends on her husband's job for her security and is affectionately condescended to when she mismanages the household accounts.

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<sup>18</sup> Strong similarities can be read between Tax's essay and Oates's work: "Men and women are brought up to be like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, with pieces carved out of their selves so they can fit into one another in the neurotic dependence most of us call love. If you make yourself whole, where are you going to find a jigsaw puzzle to fit into?" (Tax 11). Conditioned to desire and strive for their own "jigsaw" piece, she argued that women embrace a version of neurotic, controlling love, which thus became the keystone to this process of oppression:

[f]rom the day she learns to understand signals, all a woman hears is a series of contradictory instructions and conflicting descriptions of the way she is to look and behave. She must be sexy and a virgin at once. She must be appreciative, yet challenging. She must be strong, yet weak. Vulnerable, yet able to protect herself. Smart enough to get a man, but not smart enough to threaten him, or, rather, smart enough to conceal her intelligence and act manipulatively. Desired by all, but interested only in one. Sophisticated, yet naive at heart (Tax 15).

Notably, however, the gender politics of “Extraordinary Popular Delusions” rest on a desire shared by both Paul and Ann to locate something capable of opposing their varying experiences of impersonalism. They turn to possession and emotion as means of feeling personal: more authentic, rooted, connected, so that their lives have meaning. In a world in which the available forms of identity are premised on unsatisfying notions of love and family, and in which imaginaries of collectivity or group belonging are belied by urban disintegration and racial tensions, Paul’s and Ann’s illusions naturally seem the only option. But Oates makes it clear that this mode of survival does not change the real poverty of their lives.

“I Was in Love” (1970) makes an even more pointed critique of the mythology of romantic love, opening with the tragicomic line “I was in love with a man I couldn’t marry so one of us had to die”—“[a] future of love with him was a skeleton with quivering skin stretched on it, skin twitching in fear. The fear had to stop” (388). Here Oates’s assessment of the destructive notions underwriting heterosexual romantic relationships makes false consciousness impossible: romantic love is clearly constituted by the fear produced by love’s compulsive claims, its dissolution of sense of self. “I was in love with a man and could not think about [other] things. I had to think four hours each day of him, only him. I was condemned to him. When the telephone rang, I did not answer it, for fear that it would be someone else” (391). The anxiety surrounding the telephone is a frequent, unbearable index of love in Oates’s stories of this period, as female characters continually find its ring a disruptive, palpable reminder of their lack of control over their own psyches. “If he were dead, the telephone would ring with a different sound. I would always hurry to it, ready for an adventure” (401).

The protagonist’s ego in “I Was in Love,” like Ann’s, is founded upon her lover:

My thinking turns upon the other man. Each day I must think about him for a number of hours, and when I am not thinking about him, yet I am still thinking about him, aware of

him, like an actor aware of someone approaching him onstage and yet not aware, communicating to the audience this double dimension. My head aches, the nerves in my eyes twitch with this doubleness. The relief of one of us dying will be felt everywhere (393-94).

Oates's use of the imagery of "doubleness" to point to various registers of psychic impingement resonates with early second-wave discourses on a number of levels: it marks the woman's obsessive need to focus her awareness directly upon her love object ("I must think about him"), and her constant subconscious alertness to his presence. Both forms are analogized to the experience of knowing one is performing and being watched—experiential states requiring the constant affective labor of attentiveness and inducing a tension so exhausting and untenable that it takes a physical toll on the body.

Oates's protagonist also uses the concept of doubleness to describe her experience of womanhood itself. "A woman spends time before mirrors," she reflects,

content to imagine herself always in a mirror, somewhere, her truest self, while her body walks around in the world. It is the mirror self that certain men love, and that loves them; the other self is busy scraping garbage off plates and emptying the dryer of great hot coiled heaps of sheets and towels and underwear and socks. It is the mirror self that loves without exhaustion, loves with passion and violence, with tears; the other self puts the stained sheets in the washing machine and turns the dial. (405)

Oates's protagonist does not like the reflection she literally sees in the mirror—"in the looking glass of a window I saw myself, a strangely eager woman. My face is a hateful face, too sharp. There is the perpetually alert, eager, intense look about it..."—what she idealizes is the image of herself "in a mirror somewhere": an alternate fantasy version of herself (Oates "I was In Love" 392, 405). This self split between its material reality and an idealized version that seems more recognizable because it aligns with a general category of female subjectivity is clearly a form of escapism, one that appears in several Oates stories. The woman objectifies herself into an image of who she wants to be and how she wants to feel that imbues her day with value and meaning.

At the same time, this duality fosters a state of unbearable psychic instability. In this sense Oates dramatizes the experience of “female schizophrenia” that Tax also references in “Women and Her Mind,” when she writes that “[m]any women are 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” (Tax 15). Since “[f]rom the earliest age a girl is deprived of a sense of herself (ego), the sense of having an identity separate from other people’s evaluations of her,” she can function only by means of a psychic “split between mind and body, between one self and another” (Tax 14, 12).<sup>19</sup>

Both Oates’s and Tax’s texts resonate with John Berger’s 1972 account of womanhood in *Ways of Seeing*:

[a] woman must continually watch herself... From earliest childhood she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually... She has to survey everything she is and everything she does because how she appears to others, and ultimately how she appears to men, is of crucial importance for what is normally thought of as the success of her life. Her own sense of being in herself is supplanted by a sense of being appreciated as herself by another...

One might simplify this by saying: men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object - and most particularly an object of vision: a sight. (Berger 46, 47).

Oates’s protagonist clearly surveys herself as an “object of vision,” and her account of love as a state of being constantly watched similarly positions heterosexual romance as an experience of continually being looked at that equates “being looked at” with both “being appreciated” and physical and emotional exhaustion (Berger 47). Existing to herself as an objectified character in a romanticized narrative (a self that “certain men love, and that loves them” and that “that loves

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<sup>19</sup> Tax also sounds like a protagonist in an Oates story when she writes “Walk down a city street without being tuned in and you're in real danger...our society is one in which men rape, mug, and murder women whom they don't even know every day”—“[n]o woman can have an autonomous self unaffected by such encounters” (Tax 10, 12).

without exhaustion, loves with passion and violence, with tears”), the split between her ideal self and her lived self, which “ puts the stained sheets in the washing machine and turns the dial,” is constituted by what Tax calls the “series of contradictory instructions and conflicting descriptions” informing how the protagonist looks, desires, and behaves (Oates “I Was in Love” 405, Tax 14).

The protagonist of “I Was in Love” is only vaguely aware of the social constructions informing her ways of understanding herself. The psychic tension produced by her affair is in part a product of the pressure it puts on the social roles she occupies, the identity constituting “what is normally thought of as the success of her life” (Berger 47).

*Before I met you I must have been very happy, I would tell him. For instance, I worked on a committee to preserve standards in the city’s public schools. We argued about the falling tax base and the rising tax assessments, we drank coffee and smoked and argued about the families (white) that were moving out and the families (Negro) that were moving in, the teachers who were leaving for better jobs, the ‘unprepared’ (Negro) students who were holding classes back, and my face would grow white, deadly white, as I denounced the white, nervous families with money who were moving out, moving out!—constantly, steadily, daily moving out of our city! Bobby went to the neighborhood school where, every year, more little Negro children were showing up, prepared or unprepared, and it did not truly seem to me a matter of great importance whether he learned as much as he should have learned, or whether the school’s best teachers were leaving. I was very happy on that committee, drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes and arguing violently, lengthily, happily, a mother and a wife and a citizen. (395)*

She “*was very happy*” on the committee, she avows, despite having described the committee’s activities in negative terms (denounced, arguing violently). For though she did not care deeply about the polemics of the committee, she was happy to be part of it—to belong. This membership was contingent on her identity as a white married, middle-class mother. Within the story’s socio-economic and geographical context, a rapidly changing midwestern industrial

center like Detroit, this identity position is legible as a form of “feminine achievement.” Indeed, the protagonist reveals that she had been taught to aim toward these social roles by her mother.<sup>20</sup>

Yet the protagonist’s account of the committee is also undermined by its own uncertainty: the “*must have been very happy*” not quite sure, is posited in relation to how much simpler her life on the committee was, because it represented a time when she had easily fit into legible categories that were not in tension with each other. “Before falling in love, I was defined. Now I am undefined, weeds are growing between my ribs. The chore of thinking about a man for hours every day is worse than memorizing Bible verses or dates in history” (394). The committee represents one of the few examples of collectivity in Oates’s early work: gathering together to protect one’s interests appears as a form of civic engagement in the world of the story, an expression of identity-based belonging (white middle-class mothers heatedly denouncing the “falling tax base”). The protagonist’s ambivalence about the emotional content of this experience of conventional role fulfillments also seems to index her uncertainty about her current ecstatic state of being: intense, overwhelming desire has destabilized her previous identities, or “definitions,” and replaced them with the new role of romantic protagonist playing the part of woman whom “certain men love” and who “loves with passion and violence, with tears.”

The protagonist’s lover, like Ann’s Stanford, is an “undefined” person: “For years he has been on the move, packing up and driving across the country in his Volkswagen alone, leaving behind books, magazines, cracked plates, worn-out rotten clothing, worn-out friendships” (392). He now “lived alone in a big drafty house and ruined himself with people, giving himself to

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<sup>20</sup> For instance, “[m]y mother had said wisely, ‘After you’re married, you’ll discover that the best thing is to take care of your children and have parties. Do things for people, feed them and talk to them and keep them warm. Forget about the rest of it.’ She meant love, forget about love, she was bullying me out of my anguish at the thought of marriage. It was time for me to marry; she had talked to me about what I should think about and what I should forget” (401).

people, letting them devour him in the anonymous disinterested manner of maggots, without passion” (388). Then he left them, frightened” (397). In this sense, the lover stands in stark contrast to the protagonist before she was in love and to her husband, who “weighs two hundred pounds, dresses well and warmly, eats well, is loved as a second self is always loved, without commotion” (393). Unlike her husband, the lover is easily impinged upon by other people, places, and events.

And yet despite this vulnerability, the lover exerts an enormous power over the protagonist. Their relationship is in fact staged as a power conflict underwritten by desire “to drain the blood out of” the other “and be finished with him”: “If, in love, your lover puts up with evil from you, then you are loved. You must always test him” (400). “I loved him and I wanted to slide my hand inside his buttoned-up shirt, slide my hand between his ribs, take in my fingers his wonderful pulsating heart!” (404). Such violent passion, entangled with the protagonist’s “truest self,” her “mirror self,” manifests as desire for power over the lover—“I had wrenched him from his schedule. If I wanted, I could go to his table and turn it over, knock everything on the floor”—and reflects a desire to possess and be possessed by him that is never satisfied (404). This “struggle to be free and/but also to perpetuate the delusion” of love is the ideal model of romance for Oates’s women (Oates “Transformation of Self” 60). It reflects what Jackson has described as “the promise of power—of being the loved one, of ensnaring another into total psychic dependence” and what Firestone has described as a wish to “intrude or takeover” the lover’s equilibrium (Jackson 43, Firestone “Love” 17).

In Oates this romantic fantasy—encouraging women to “need love to validate their existence,” such that the lover became the superego and “grantor of identity”—frames protagonism in a love story as a means to subjectivity. Characters cling to this fantasy despite the

ways in which it is experienced as untenable, unsatisfying, and even psychically dangerous. Illustrating many of the tenets animating Firestone's criticism of love, "I Was in Love" presents love as a struggle for control that dooms women to a dependence and bars romance from being anything other than destructive to both parties.<sup>21</sup> Firestone's critique of this warping of love was underwritten was to call for feminists to transform the practices and premises of romance so that it might function not as a conflict that cemented oppression but as "total emotional vulnerability" and an "exchange of selves": "a revolutionary in every bedroom cannot fail to shake up the status quo" (Firestone "Love" 17, *Dialectic of Sex* 38). "I Was in Love" is far from so utopian. It offers not "revolution in the bedroom" but a violent climax: a guilt-induced confrontation between the woman and her young son that results in him jumping out of her moving car (407).<sup>22</sup> The story ends with the protagonist emerging from the resulting wreck, unsure of whether or not her son is still alive.

While not all Oatesian love affairs end in dramatic death or destruction, many are tinged with violence and the psychological impairments resulting from the destructive role love plays in their lives. In stories like "How I Contemplated the World from the Detroit House of Corrections" (1969) or "A Girl at the Edge of the Ocean" (1972), romantic passion is bound up with vulnerability to or complicity in abuse. Several young women are pimped out for drugs and sexually exploited. Their submission to and emotional dependence on their abusers is totalizing and pivots on a form of desire predicated on the lover having power over them ("she was not

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<sup>21</sup> Firestone's famous claim that "love, *perhaps even more than childbearing*, is the pivot of women's oppression" gave love a particularly weighty role in women's political experience. It competed with the biological constraint of pregnancy in shaping the "sex class system"—the reason for which the "woman is rarely allowed to realize herself through activity in the larger (male) society" (Firestone "Love" 16, emphasis added; 21). For a detailed account of this and other early second-wave readings of romantic love, see Robin Kay-Marie Payne's interesting dissertation, "Love and Liberation: Second-Wave Feminisms and the Problem of Romantic Love."

<sup>22</sup> This seems to echo the comment Gloria Schuh observed in a consciousness-raising session transcribed in *Notes from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Year* that "the only visible way we allow ourselves an outlet" is "toward something totally powerless like an animal or child" (*Notes from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Year*, "Men and Violence," 42).

going to think of his fingers closing about her face, so loving, so gentle, but hinting at their power to squeeze her face out of shape” [“Girl at the Edge of the Ocean,” 342]). In such stories, Oates is clearly interrogating the psychic structures of abuse and their relationship to fantasies of submission: “[i]t was good to be told what to do” (“Girl at the Edge of the Ocean” 338). Her account of these women’s inner lives is not far from what Ti-Grace Atkinson describes in “Radical Feminism” as “a euphoric state of fantasy in which the victim transforms her oppressor into her redeemer,” such that “‘love’ is the natural response of the victim to the rapist” (Atkinson 8). Often this form of sexual fantasy, in which fascination with sexual violence manifests as complicity in one’s own demise, is marked as the province of adolescence. In Oates’s much-anthologized “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?” (1966), for instance, such fascination leads teenage Connie to literally and figuratively open the door to the eerily menacing Arnold Friend.

Even relationships less clearly marked by mistreatment or abuse manifest what Firestone called “love in its destructive guise” (Firestone 17). Stories like “Free” (1974), for instance, which explicitly takes up the question of both economic and emotional liberation, underscore the deep psychological roots of women’s reliance on love for a sense of self. Economic and biological limitations to gender equality in these stories are nowhere near as difficult for women to overcome as the psychological ones attached to heterosexual relationships. Set at the edge of the 1960s counterculture, “Free” follows a young woman who leaves her upper-middle-class life to move to New York and “free” herself of inauthenticity and dependence, represented by her parents’ bourgeois lifestyle and her inability to engage in an open relationship. Lea gains economic independence from her parents and their world but quickly undermines the autonomy she believes she has won: the romantic situations into which she enters continually demonstrate

that material freedom can obscure psychic enslavement, as readers see Lea again and again shape herself in relation to the words of the men in her life.

If freedom was this painful, it would be a permanent freedom. She would be free. She would please only herself and she would be only herself, she would show no allegiance to anyone else. Already she had stopped writing home; she sent her parents' letter back to them, with their inevitable checks, and scribbled in brief answers. (140)

This quest for "freedom" is abandoned when she falls in love with Terry: "Everything in her fell toward him. Gravity shifted toward him. She stared into his face and thought he might do anything he wanted with her" (143). Here love manifests as speaking words that are "out of her control" and "having no will to resist him" (143, 145). It also involves feeling "female" in a new way, not because of the new domestic duties she takes on when she moves in with him and his children, but because her new feelings of fear and jealousy register as "female": "Now it's women I feel edgy around, because I identify with them so strongly, I know they're competitors of mine, I'm in danger of losing you" (144). Being in love with Terry is the most psychically damaging of all Lea's experiences, creating a relationship destructive to both parties, as well as the children. The dependence at the heart of the relationship is indexed the dependence on drugs the couple also develops, which spirals Lea in a blurry world of high-ideals grounded by unemployment, depression, and child neglect. The story ends with Lea mentally unstable, once again dependent on a man, this time her therapist, on whom she relies to give her life structure and meaning: "She took [his] words home with her and broke them down into syllables and into sounds, looking for meaning" (152).

Lea's desire to be overwhelmed by "totally irrational, possessive, ego-destroying love" emerges in this story as an attempt to locate a life that is more meaningful than the one modelled to her by her parents, which she finds inauthentic (Oates Transformation of Self 60). "'Was there ever anyone you loved, I mean passionately?'" Lea asks her mother. "So that you wanted to

die?” (Free 134). She is convinced that intense feeling is the access point to a better, more honest type of relationship. This critique of the hypocrisy of her parents’ marriage and bourgeois lifestyle is maintained by the story—readers can see why the form of love they represent is unappealing—but Lea’s own attitudes prove far from a viable alternative. In this sense, the story, like many others from these early short fiction collections, frames the fantasy of this destructive love as a response to the failure of conventional forms of domestic life that is especially seductive for youth and linked to the youth counterculture.

Oates’s early short fiction collections do, however, offer at least two important openings for alternative forms of experiencing relationality and togetherness. Notably, these are anchored in the heterosexual couple. “Puzzle” (1970), for instance, points toward the mutual support and vulnerability that Firestone holds up as the real potential of love. The story recounts scenes from the life of a woman who has recently lost her son and is trying to cope with her grief. It begins with motifs seen in other stories about how social definitions of feminine success can offer a sense of security and stability (“I can define myself clearly. I am an adult, a wife” [41]), and about the ways that external discourses shape a woman’s identity (“her words got into me, ringing in my head. Something is always getting into a woman, giving her shape, pushing her out of shape” [41]). The protagonist sees her life as “a series of boxes, rooms” (46), containers that give her shape and define who she is and how she acts. Since the death of her son, the woman has felt increasingly at the mercy of the impingements of the world—its noises, images, people—and she frequently mentally notes her “definitions,” or identities, in order to locate herself and try to make sense of her life and its meaning: “I am a married woman, a wife, an ex-mother, aged thirty” (39). She frequently dissociates from the world, “*I am not really here,*” when situations become overwhelming.

The protagonist has for years born resentment toward her husband, whom she insists is not “my real husband,” the smiling young man she met years at the beach years before (52). Rather, he is two men, a romanticized image of the younger man she was first taken with and his current aged, hardened self. As in “I Was in Love,” this split between adolescent fantasy and the reality of her adult relationship produces an unstable oscillation: “I loved that [first] man, but the man who lived with us, the man who slept with me, I hated. I did not hate him but I was afraid of him. I loved him sometimes, but most of the time I hated him. I wished he was dead” (47). Since her son’s death, the woman has grown further detached from him: “[h]e said to me, three days after the funeral, ‘Why don’t you say something? I live here too’” (42). Angry words and power games reflect the woman’s disappointment with her husband, her feelings of having been misled by the romantic fantasy promised by his attractive younger self. The disconnect between the couple accentuates the protagonist’s sense of complete isolation and her inability to recognize herself in the identities she repeats to herself.

The climax of the story occurs when the woman’s husband tries to take responsibility for the accident that killed their son. Confessing that he had thought about the danger posed by the drainage ditch in which their son drowned days his death but had forgotten to remind the son to stay away, he claims the death as his fault. This unexpected and painful expression of guilt, remorse, and grief freezes the protagonist, who seems to have forgotten that her husband is a subject with feelings and not a symbol of masculine otherness. “His face is anxious and sweaty, an aging face. I have an impulse to touch it—is it warm? What does it feel like to live behind that particular face? But I cannot move” (53). Becoming a “particular face,” the husband moves beyond her two fixed dual images of him. The suspension of her resentment towards him brings her new awareness of and access to her own feelings:

Now I will tell this man the things I must tell him. It is time. It is time for me to tell him of my hatred for him, and my love, and the terrible anger that has wanted to scream its way out of me for years, screaming into his face, into his body. It is time for me to tell him that the death was my fault. Jackie died because I wanted his father dead. (52-53)

In this sense, his expression of vulnerability and emotional honesty facilitates a moment of exchange that offers real respite and does more to help her locate herself than her recitation of her identities.

I go to him and put my arms around him, his head and his shoulders, and he presses himself against me, exhausted, hot, breathing hard. He hides his face against me and I can't see him. What is this puzzle of people!—what have they to do with one another? They can't help one another. They are better alone. Jackie did not die because my husband forgot about the ditch...he did not die because we had to move here, because my husband was a failure...he did not die because I wanted his father dead. There is no reason. He died. (53)

In such moments, Oates presents interrelation as both possible and necessary—but distinctly frames it as located beyond existing fantasy concepts of what marriage or love is supposed to be or look like. Though the protagonist's inner dialogue is nihilistic and atomistic—people are “better alone” and “can't help one another,” life lacks sense and meaning—the scene in fact argues to the contrary that people can overcome their aloneness through communication of their mutual vulnerability and openness to what Firestone called an “*exchange of selves*” (Firestone “Love” 17).

“It is a puzzle. I cannot understand. I am here in my husband's embrace, in the silence of our marriage, and there is nothing outside of this moment, this love I have been allotted, that I can understand” (54). “Puzzle” certainly does not end on a utopian note—the protagonist's passive reference to “the love I have been allotted” continues to frame her marriage as something outside of her power and choice. Yet the scene also seems to suggest that her relationship with her husband is the only way that either can begin to process their son's death or heal from their grief: it is only by turning toward each other, instead of remaining closed within themselves, that

either makes any progress toward making sense of their feelings about what has happened. In this sense, the image of the couple embracing “this love I have been allotted” that closes the story opens up the possibility that together people might be able to help each other.

This moment positing the possibility of romantic love can be paired with another story from this period, “The Lady with the Pet Dog” (1972), which rejects the lack of sovereignty at the heart of destructive love and instead suggests that autonomy and love need not be mutually exclusive and that moving beyond destructive love is possible. Re-envisioning the Anton Chekov story of the same name, the story begins in the same space as many of the destructive love stories: it opens with Anna having glimpsed her lover months after their affair had finished and immediately being overwhelmed by feelings of love that are experienced as coercive: “Why, why did he love her, why did he pursue her? Why did he want her to die?” (407). She says “to him in her imagination, ‘one of us should die’” (393). We thus meet Anna under the familiar thrall of volatile, compulsive passion, in which the very way her lover says her name—“‘Anna?’ with its lifting of the second syllable, questioning and apologetic and making its claim”—exerts unbearable power over her (397). After months apart, in which she has lived like a “shadow woman,” the two resume their romance and her months of numbness are quickly replaced by the feeling that “[s]he wanted nothing except to be free of him...*Oh*, she thought suddenly, *I will follow you back and kill you*” (399). Yet this impulse is coupled with desire for her lover’s emotional dependence on her, which is experienced as the greatest expression of his love.

Critics interested in Oates’s metafictional reworking of the literary canon read “The Lady with the Pet Dog” in terms of its revision of Chekov’s original story from the perspective of its female character. Susana Isabel Araújo, for instance, has read this story as a reflection on “the metafictional issue of the artist’s relationship with his muse and female character” that indexes the

question of authorial autonomy, both in relation to the text and to literary tradition (Araújo “Marriages and Infidelities” 118). Situating the text within the context of Oates’s short fiction of the period, its interrogation of autonomy also speaks to Oates’s ongoing critique of romantic passion. From this perspective, what Oates stages in this story is one woman’s progress from destructive love, in which her ego is externally constituted by her lover, toward what Greer identified in *The Female Eunuch* as “an attainable ideal of love” that exists “between self-realizing personalities” (Greer 164).

At the beginning of the story Anna considers herself “delicate and imprecise. There was no boundary to her, no edge” (395). She lacked an identity. Inhabiting this ambivalence is replaced by the ways the affair gives her a role, that of lover, but the unbearability of that position does anything but strengthen her sense of self. Instead “Anna feels doubly imprisoned, not only by her social role as a wife and being a married woman, but also and more problematically by her renewed role as a ‘lover,’ which now dominates her life” (Araújo 119). It becomes clear that even as a lover she still has “no boundary to her, no edge,” since she is not separate from her lover and cannot conceive of herself in terms that are not proximate to him. Convinced, like the protagonist of “Puzzle”, that “[n]o person could save another... she drew back from him and released him” (Oates “Puzzle” 393-94).

In fact, Anna experiences the world as terrifyingly impersonal, “a universe of disjointed, separate things,” full of brittle relationships with little meaning: “She felt panic for the world outside this car, all that was not herself and this man, and at the same time she understood that she was free of him, as people are free of other people, she would leave him soon, safely, and within a few days he would have fallen into the past, the impersonal past” (408, 394). The concepts of mutuality, dependability, and even interrelationality do not seem to exist for Anna.

“Everywhere on this highway, at this moment, there were men and women driving together, bonded together—what did that mean, to be together? What did it mean to enter into a bond with another person? No, she did not really trust him. She did not really trust men” (392-93). Anna sees the world as constituted by monads—sometimes travelling together, but still fundamentally monads—moving on an impersonal highway. As for Paul of “Extraordinary Popular Delusions,” for Anna the highway symbolizes the dispersion and disconnection of individuals: bonds are transitory, relationships are one-sided, and men are fundamentally all the same. A future for Anna’s love affair seems impossible, not because she is afraid to leave her husband, but because love itself is unstable, a temporary intimacy that will eventually fade into the “impersonal past.” Her passion feels insurmountable, overwhelming, and fundamental precisely because it offers a momentary respite from this landscape of isolation and this “universe of disjointed, separate things” (408).

Interestingly, a shift in this dynamic occurs in the last pages of the story when Anna sees this separateness not as isolating and threatening but actually a condition enabling relation. This shift is made possible but her sudden ability to conceive of herself as separate from her lover, which transforms her relationship both to him and to their love.

she happened to catch sight of his reflection in the bureau mirror—he was glancing down at himself, checking himself mechanically, impersonally, preparing also to leave. He too would leave this room: he too was headed somewhere else. She stared at him. It seemed to her that in this instance he was breaking from her, the image of her lover fell free from her...and she realized that he existed in a dimension quite apart from her, a mysterious being. And suddenly, joyfully, she felt a miraculous calm... And she did not hate him, she did not hate herself any longer; she did not wish to die; she was flooded with a strange certainty, a sense of gratitude, of pure selfless energy. It was obvious to her that she had, all along, been behaving correctly; out of instinct. What triumph, to love like this... (410)

Araújo has read this scene “in Lacanean terms” as Oates’s “separation from her primordial bond with her progenitor, in this case, her literary creator, Chekhov himself,” and framed it as the

moment that marks Oates becoming an independent writer with respect to the male literary tradition (Araújo “Marriages and Infidelities” 120). But in the context of Oates’s work and its commentary on the nature of romantic love, it is perhaps better read as one in which Anna realizes she can be separate from her lover without losing her relation to him. In this sense, Anna is able to shift from a form of attachment premised in non-sovereignty, love as something that happens to her, to love as a choice, a question to which she in the final line of the story answers “yes.” Indeed, the story ends with a word of affirmation—Anna’s ambiguous “yes” to her lover’s query of her sudden joy—and thus becomes one of Oates’s few early stories to conclude on a positive note.

Anna’s “yes” seems also to be Oates’s affirmation of the possibility present within Anna’s realization: that independence can also be a relay of relation and that it can be discovered interpersonally. Oates’s personalist concerns—her desire to locate “meaning beyond the self” in a socially disconnected world—dovetail with her feminist ones in rethinking how the heterosexual couple might serve as a site bearing out love that does not rely on convention to be known and that might mutually facilitate self-knowledge and growth.

**“Now that the revolution needs numbers / motherhood got a new position / five steps behind manhood”: Toni Cade Bambara’s Personalist Project of Black Nationalism<sup>23</sup>**

Bambara’s work, explicitly feminist, political, and optimistic, has been praised for its deft use of the black vernacular idiom and its ability to capture the ethos of black life.<sup>24</sup> Her short

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<sup>23</sup> From “Poem,” by Kay Lindsay, *The Black Woman*.

<sup>24</sup> See for instance “Toni Cade Bambara and the Black Vision” in Jane Duran’s *Women, Philosophy, and Literature*, Lindon Barrett’s “Identities and Identity Studies: Reading Toni Cade Bambara’s ‘The Hammer Man,’” Elliott Butler-Evans’ *Race, Gender, and Desire: Narrative Strategies in the Fiction of Toni Cade Bambara, Toni Morrison, and Alice Walker* and *Savoring the Salt: The Legacy of Toni Cade Bambara* edited by Linda J. Holmes and Cheryl A. Wall.

fiction from the early second-wave period takes up many of the concerns outlined in the famous anthology that she compiled and edited, *The Black Woman*, the first collection of black women's writing created for and by black women. The anthology, which drew attention and gave voice to the intersection of oppressions bearing on black women's lives, even before the Combahee Statement, provides an important context for Bambara's stories, as it indexes the historical discourses called into question by the anthology: the black liberation movement: Daniel Moynihan's famous 1965 congressional report, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (also known as the Moynihan Report); and white feminism.

Bambara's short fiction is distinct from the work of the other black women writers of the period, with whom she is often grouped, in that it is less interested in tracing black intimate violence to racism and white supremacy than in highlighting the possibility for change present within the black community.<sup>25</sup> This is notable within the context of black writing from the period, which was steeped in the discourse of black emasculation, and within the context of black women's writing of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century more generally, which has tended to emphasize the violent implications of racism on domestic spaces and interpersonal relationships.<sup>26</sup> While racism constitutes the structural backdrop against which characters operate, in Bambara's fiction from this period, black intracommunity dynamics are idealized and take center stage. Indeed, it is Bambara's "in-the-here-and-now community studies" that mark her as a personalist, one who frames concepts like identity, liberation, and nation as processes unfolding among persons who enact communal solidarity in their daily actions (Avery 191).

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<sup>25</sup> See for instance *Savoring the Salt: The Legacy of Toni Cade Bambara* edited by Linda J. Holmes and Cheryl A. Wall, especially Avery F. Gordon's "something more powerful than skepticism."

<sup>26</sup> See for instance Duran, "Toni Cade Bambara and the Black Vision."

This stance was notable in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when Black nationalism had grown to encompass Black Power and was pervasively extolling black difference, articulated in the language of black masculinity, as what bound blacks together. This celebration of blackness was consciously intended to challenge the findings of Daniel Moynihan's infamous 1965 congressional report, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, which was widely read as pathologizing and emasculating the black community by imputing its cultures of poverty to a deterioration of the family engendered by black women.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, Black nationalism's appeal was premised in the "idea of creating separate communities within the United States" and distinctly premised black liberation in the sovereignty of black men (Nicholson 128, Crawford 185). Within this framework, "the truly 'revolutionary' Black woman was a supportive one, who kept house while the Black man kept revolution" (Roth 84-85). In this sense, black anxieties about the impotency of the black population—bound up in fears of genocide, castration, and patriarchy that were compounded by the Moynihan report—translated into a political discourse of racial uplift and organization in which "women's bodies were too often the medium for black male dreams of a nation state" that was to be consolidated through its repudiation of and distinction from white American culture (Crawford 196).

Bambara's women characters "respond ambivalently to their roles within th[is] totalizing enterprise of Black cultural nationalism," explicitly imagined as a patriarchal project, and to the interventions of the U.S. welfare state into their lives, which also organized black life along patriarchal lines. Probing women's overlapping and intersecting oppressions and their

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<sup>27</sup> For a fuller account of the masculinist discourses underpinning Black nationalism, see for instance, *Identity Before Identity Politics*, by Linda Nicholson, *Is It Nation Time?: Contemporary Essays on Black Power and Black Nationalism*, edited by Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., *Want to Start a Revolution?: Radical Women in the Black Freedom Struggle*, edited by Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard, *Women's Work: Nationalism and Contemporary African American Women's Novels*, by Courtney Thorsson.

relationship to the prominent images of black life motivating black identity politics, Bambara was committed to proliferating conceptions of black collectivity and womanhood that challenged those on offer (Butler-Evans 109). Her work traces women of different ages, backgrounds, and geographical locations as they negotiate conservative gender norms and competing value systems: the tension between U.S. national culture and black social formations, between Christian values and African ones, and the presence of differing definitions of revolution, femininity, and obligation become evidence of a black plurality that Bambara nonetheless always roots in local communities with shared cultures and a sense of unity.

Bambara's localizing of black liberation's claims about the existence of a collective black experience moreover makes use of the ways women's liberation turned to neighborhood networks, consciousness-raising groups, and acts of solidarity to advocate an imaginary of black nationalism that is decidedly personalist because it toggles between obligation to self, to others, and to the liberation struggle. Bambara uses feminist interest in personal life to ground black identity politics and her personalist emphasis on everyday expressions of communal spirit that seem closer to King's Beloved Community than to the vision of shared black experience operative at the end of the 1960s. Nation for Bambara was community, and it was prefigured in the small everyday moments of intersubjectivity that allow us to become legible to ourselves and conscious of our own feelings, attachments, and desires. By arguing that the foundations for a transformative black nationhood were located in the practices and performances of solidarity already constituting black worlds, Bambara framed nationalism as "a turning away from the larger society and a turning toward each other" (Bambara BW Preface 7). In this sense, her short

stories interrogate both the threat and the possibility inherent in the process of imagining collective black belonging.<sup>28</sup>

By putting static generalizations about black life into dialogue with the experiences and needs of individuals, Bambara draws heavily from King's concept of personal responsibility and its articulation of personal work as collective work. "Revolution begins with the self, in the self" and must promote, "above all, total self-autonomy" (Bambara "Thinking about the great white hope" 243). This vision of revolution called for attending to and prioritizing obligations to the people in our lives, moving from the needs of the self and our immediate relationships to our local community, before branching out toward more abstract notions of nation:

We'd better take the time to fashion revolutionary selves, revolutionary lives, revolutionary relationships... Running off to mimeograph a fuck-whitey leaflet, leaving your mate to brood, is not revolutionary. Hopping a plane to rap to someone else's 'community' while your son struggles alone with the Junior Scholastic assignment on "The Dark Continent" is not revolutionary. Sitting around murder-mouthing incorrect niggers while your father goes upside your mother's head is not revolutionary. Mapping out a building takeover when your term paper is overdue and your scholarship is under review is not revolutionary. Talking about moving against the Mafia while your nephew takes off old ladies at the subway stop is not revolutionary. If your house ain't in order, you ain't in order. It is so much easier to be out there than right here... The revolution ain't out there. Yet. But it is here. (Bambara "Issue of Roles" 110)

Like King, Bambara rhetorically situated her appeal in the work of attending to one's actions and beginning with one's own relationships if we want change. She thus directly challenged the rhetoric framing revolution as centrifugal—consolidating black nationhood by mounting attack on the racist forces assailing it. Taking aim at an external enemy often came at the expense of effacing moments of political potential manifest in daily life (Bambara "On the Issue of Roles")

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<sup>28</sup> An active participant in the Black Arts movement that emerged in tandem with Black nationalism, Bambara was committed to cultivating the networks, encounters, and connections that helped visualize and bring nation into being. "Bambara's potluck dinners for local writers at her home were legendary. She organized frequent gatherings of artists and intellectuals and brought writers together in less formal ways, often arranging one-on-one meetings" (Smethurst 215). Her writing served as an extension of this work. She also co-founded the Southern Collective of African American Writers in Atlanta in 1978 with Alice Lovelace.

110).<sup>29</sup> Framing liberation as “an embrace of community and a hardheaded attempt to get basic with each other,” or to get personal and direct, Bambara moreover indexed the agenda of authenticity animating the earlier New Left: her call to honor honesty, openness, directness, and practicality looked to what Courtney Thorsson has described as “scenes of organizing, cooking, dancing, mapping, and inscribing to create a distinct nationalist discourse” (Bambara, “On the Issue of Roles” 109, 101; Black Women Preface 7, Thorsson 1). Privileging such scenes of black life as expressions of nationalism with political import explicitly undercut Black Nationalism’s desire to neutralize associations of black life with the female, which it feared supported claims of black emasculation.

This is not to say that Bambara completely disavowed the rhetoric of black liberation. Indeed, she upheld a commitment to being “hardheaded”—to pragmatic political action and the work of revolution—that is strongly accented by Black Nationalism, and her desire to cultivate “revolutionary selves, revolutionary lives, [and] revolutionary relationships” was premised in the “ethos of organizing around one’s own oppression” that embraced an exclusionary imaginary of the black nation as the foundation for building a politics (Roth 202).<sup>30</sup> Moreover, her critique of liberal state welfare, which echoes Day’s, is a rejection of the cycles of dependence and oppression this support could perpetuate that also overlaps with Black nationalist views, which

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<sup>29</sup> Cheryl A. Wall has pointed out that black women’s writing from the 1980s onward—including authors such as Lucille Clifton, Gayl Jones, Audre Lorde, Paule Marshall, Toni Morrison, Gloria Naylor, and Alice Walker—has tended to “focus instead on those intimate relationships in which the most painful consequences of racism are played out. Racism corrodes love between black and women, fractures families, and destroys mothers’ dreams for their children. The best defense against the destructiveness of racism, these writers assert, is the formation of a cultural identity derived from an understanding of history” (Wall 6).

<sup>30</sup> As Benita Roth has usefully noted, “The ethos of organizing around one’s own oppression is commonly seen in retrospect as emanating from a series of events in the Black movement; in this view, its watershed moment is the decision by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) to ask white activists to leave and go into their own communities to address racism there. SNCC’s actions, the result of the influx of white volunteers into the organization during Freedom Summer, were (and still are) seen as sanctioning the idea that the most authentic and, therefore, most radical forms of activism involved fighting one’s own oppression” (Roth 202).

emphasized the amount of black households reliant on income derived from welfare institutions (coded as white). Yet Bambara was in constant dialogue with the grounds upon which Black nationalism rested—and female voices became her means of complicating its definitions of community and political activism.

The writing Bambara produced for and collected in *The Black Woman* (1970) is a useful introduction to how she situated herself at the intersection of Black Nationalism and the rise of early second-wave feminism and their respective concerns over “genocide” and “liberation” (Bambara “Genocide or liberation”). The anthology collected contributions from a range of women—from Bambara’s mother and undergraduate students to Nikki Giovanni, Alice Walker, Audre Lorde, Frances Beale, and Abbey Lincoln—who penned responses to the array of negative images of black womanhood circulating in the late 1960s U.S. Many of *The Black Woman*’s authors speak directly to claims made by Black Nationalists—‘abandon the pill and breed revolutionaries,’ ‘stand behind your man’—and to tactics like “guerilla theater,” being used by white feminists to gain political legitimacy.<sup>31</sup> Bambara’s preface to the volume highlights the uneasy overtures made to black women by both movements:

When the [liberation] experts (white or Black, male) turn their attention to the Black woman, the reports get murky, for they usually clump the men and women together and focus so heavily on what white people have done to the psyches of Blacks, that what Blacks have done to and for themselves is overlooked, and what distinguishes the men from the women forgotten... [at the same time,] how relevant are the truths, the experiences, the findings of white women to Black women? Are women after all simply women? I don’t know that our priorities are the same, that our concerns and methods are the same, or even similar enough (Bambara Preface 8).

Critical of both positions, Bambara’s anthology, made purposively affordable so it would be widely accessible, was, as Thorsson has noted, “a declarative event,” calling a unique collective

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<sup>31</sup> For example, “The Pill” essay, “Black People and the Victorian Ethos,” etc.

called Black Womanhood into being by carving out a singular space that refused to be collapsed into these other categories (Thorsson “Introduction” unpaginated). It was the first text to frame the questions, fears, complaints, and concerns of black women as an identity and powerfully argued that both “the black family crisis” initiated by the Moynihan Report and the “fear of genocide” animating Black Power were antithetical to “the health and well-being of black women” (Crawford 197). The poems, essays, short stories, transcripts, dialogues, and rap contained in the anthology challenge generalized “types” used to depict black women in the black community: “the matriarch and the evil Black bitch,” “welfare mamas”, domineering emasculators, and “soul sisters” (BW 11, 76). “What Black woman did you have in mind?” Bambara asks in one essay, insisting that this reduction of the heterogeneity of individual women was complicit in crystallizing racist imagery. “Each of us, after all, has particular skills and styles” (Bambara “Issue of Roles” 101). The anthology’s varied voices and viewpoints offer counter-punctual rejoinders to such discursive attempts to define how black women culturally signified. In this sense, the text has been hailed for its account of the “intersectionality of inequalities” (Roth 11).<sup>32</sup> Indeed, *The Black Woman* “became a catalyst for reading and discussion groups around the issues it raised” that grew quickly into a bestseller (Griffin 123).

Bambara’s two collections of short fiction from this same period, *Gorilla, My Love* (1972) and *The Sea Birds Are Still Alive* (1977), in dialogue with the anthology, serve as a clear argument against the Moynihanian claim that black communities are pathological. In contrast to Oates’s ethos of atomism, Bambara’s stories are full of forms of communalism: families, groups of friends, neighborhoods, cooperatives, and political organizations are common actors in neighborhoods and towns animated by senses of themselves as communities. The slice of life to

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<sup>32</sup> Essays such as Beale’s “Double Jeopardy” make this point explicitly.

which readers gain access through the stories shows a range of figures: swindlers, activists, tom-boys, salesgirls; men who take advantage of women and those who serve as role models; women in various stages of political and personal consciousness. Bambara has a sharp eye for realism in her depiction of various black milieus, relying heavily on black vernaculars and emphasizing black social spaces in an era when black women writers typically wrote more explicitly towards mixed-race audiences.<sup>33</sup> As Elliott Butler-Evans points out, Bambara “attempts to reproduce the nuances of Black urban speech and diverges significantly from the linguistic forms of the dominant culture...References to the cultural practices of Black life, all grounded in specific semiotic structures, evoke for the reader familiar with that culture a recognizable world and transmit ‘realistic’ information to those outside it,” with the aim of contributing “to the symbolic construction of a Black community” (Butler-Evans 95).

These depictions lean toward the aspirational and the constructive: the difficulties present in mid- to late 20<sup>th</sup> century U.S. black life, especially the destructive effects of poverty and violence, are present but often appear comical and nonthreatening. What gets more heavily underscored are the limitations and damage posed by what Bambara considers the community-destroying politics of state welfare and Black Nationalism, which both problematically intervene in and try to control the way that blacks conceive of themselves and behave. Indeed, the world presented by Bambara’s fiction seems to answer the grievance raised by the speaker of Nikki Giovanni’s “Nikki Rosa,” which Bambara included in *The Black Woman*:

they never talk about how happy you were to have your mother / all to yourself... and  
somehow when you talk about home / it never gets across how much you / understood  
their feelings / as the whole family attended meetings about Hollydale ...and though  
you’re poor it isn’t poverty that / concerns you / and though they fought a lot / it isn’t  
your father’s drinking that makes any difference /

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<sup>33</sup> For instance contemporaries like Alice Walker and Toni Morrison, who was Bambara’s editor and friend.

but only that everybody is together...because they'll never understand Black love is Black wealth and they'll / probably talk about my hard childhood and never understand that / all the while I was quite happy (Giovanni *BW* 16)

Focused on moments of “Black wealth,” oppression in Bambara’s stories appears as that which razes or forecloses the vibrancy at the heart of the scenes of communalism she depicts.

Personalist recuperation of heterogeneity and relocation of the terms of community in formations different from those upheld by the welfare state or Black Nationalism is committed to a version of communalism and ethics located in excavation of the African diaspora: “[t]he values of UJAMAA, ‘Each one teach one,’ ‘listen to the elders,’ and ‘save the children’” (Russel 10).<sup>34</sup>

This version of community also reflects the didactic priorities of the Black Arts Movement: “Our art, protest, dialogue no longer spring from the impulse to entertain, or to indulge or enlighten the conscience of the enemy; white people, whiteness, or racism; men, maleness, or chauvinism: America, or imperialism” (Bambara Preface 7). Instead, Bambara’s was a call to turn inward, to “touch and to unify,” by reframing moments of communalism in Black experience as a site for learning, growth, and liberation (Bambara Preface 7). The racial imaginaries provided by the liberal welfare state and the Black nationalist movement are instead marked as limiting discourses, in which women could not participate but which nonetheless shaped their lives and established the narratives available for understanding how they act, love, or dream. They also appear as obstacles to unity by introducing non-organic and divisive rhetoric into community spaces.

*Gorilla, My Love*’s “The Hammer Man” (1966) stages this dynamic relatively explicitly. Here fluid gender politics and expressions of racial solidarity become sites of contention and tension because of the ways state institutions intrude in black life. The story, like many in the

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<sup>34</sup> Bambara, born Toni Cade, changed her name in the 1970 to reflect her African heritage.

*Gorilla* collection, is told from the perspective of a young, pre-adolescent girl, who lives with her family in Harlem and wants to grow up to “become a doctor and take care of [her father] in his old age” (37). The neighborhood in which she lives is clearly volatile and violent: an altercation between Hazel and her neighbor Manny—who “was supposed to be crazy”—over “what I called him” and “a few choice things [I said] about his mother,” result in a violent neighborhood showdown whose absurdity recalls the black humor of Chester Himes:

I had already told Miss Rose that Crazy Manny was after me. And Miss Rose, being who she was, quite naturally went over to Manny’s house and said a few harsh words to his mother, who, being who she was, chased Miss Rose out into the street and they commenced to get with it, snatching bottles out of the garbage cans and breaking them on the johnny pumps and stuff like that... Miss Rose came up with sticks and table legs and things, and Manny’s mother had her share of scissor blades and bicycle chains. They got to rolling in the streets and all you could see was pink drawers and fat legs (36)

Then Hazel’s father “got in on it too, cause he happened to ask Manny one night why he was sitting on the stoop like that every night. Manny told him right off that was going to kill me first chance he got. Quite naturally this made my father a little warm, me being his only daughter” (37).

He had a few words with Manny first, and then he got hold of the older brother, Bernard, who was more his size. Bernard didn’t see how any of it was his business or my father’s business, so my father got mad and jammed Bernard’s head into the mailbox. Then my father started getting messages from Bernard’s uncle about where to meet him for a showdown...[But] then Manny fell off the roof, and my father went back to his beer-drinking buddies. (37)

The comic, untroubled matter-of-factness with which Hazel recounts this opening sequence situates us in a world in which such violence is not frightening—not only because it is every day and shallow, quickly aroused and easily dissipated, but also because Hazel does not perceive it as threatening to her well-being. She herself picks fights, “hitting off little girls in the school year, or waiting for Frankie to come in so we could raise some hell” (36). Thus, while she

is worried about raising the wrath of Crazy Manny, and goes into “hiding” by pretending to have “yellow fever,” this is more a product of regret for having picked the wrong fight than a manifestation of fear of this system of tit-for-tat (35). To the contrary, this opening scene indexes the networks of families and alliances that come to life within the neighborhood in such moments of conflict:

Everyone would congregate on the window sills or the fire escape, commenting that it was still much too cold for this kind of nonsense. But they watched anyway. And then Manny fell off the roof and that was that. Miss Rose went back to her dream books and Manny’s mother went back to her tumbled-down kitchen of dirty clothes and bundles of rags and children. (37)

In this way, such escapades serve as a form of community entertainment and distraction from the material reality of poverty, which essentially shape the neighborhood’s shared world.

This ethos comes into tension with world outside it a few pages later, when, in the climax of the story, Hazel witnesses two police officers confront Manny in a local park. Manny, who has been obsessively shooting layups as a form of self-punishment for recently missing a game-winning play, does not even notice the officers arrive, until one

finally grabbed the ball to get Manny’s attention. But that didn’t work. Manny just stood there with his arms out waiting for the pass so he could save the game. He wasn’t paying no mind to the cop. So, quite naturally, when the cop slapped him upside his head it was a surprise. (40)

An altercation ensues, in which the destructive presence of the state is mediated by Hazel’s witnessing of the scene.

‘Did you hear what I said, black boy?’ Now when somebody says that word like that, I gets warm. And crazy or no crazy, Manny was my brother at that moment and the cop was the enemy. ‘You better give him his ball back,’ I said. ‘Manny don’t take no mess from no cops. He ain’t bothering nobody. He’s gonna be Mister Basketball when he grows up. Just trying to get a little practice in before the softball season starts.’ ‘Look here, sister, we’ll run you in too,’ Harpo said. ‘I damn sure can’t be your sister seeing how I’m a black girl. Boy, I sure will be glad when you run me in so I can tell everybody about that. You must think you’re in the South, mister.’” (40-41)

Hazel, who has been mesmerized by the repetition of Manny's elegant shots and has long forgotten their previous dispute, is moved to come to his aid not when the officer resorts to force but when he, an outsider, "the enemy," identifies Manny racially as Black. This act is dramatized as more threatening than any of the earlier scenes of violence. As Lindon Barrett has observed, Bambara's framing of this moment "invites the reader to see that the violent confrontations of the latter half of the story are driven by an institutionally sanctioned animus much more menacing" than the actions of Hazel's family and neighbors; rather, "these earlier interactions seem benign, if vitiated, forms of community converse" (Barrett 312). This aggression on the part of the police officer instead appears as an attack on the impulsive but ultimately nonthreatening world that Manny and Hazel inhabit.

Moreover, the meaning of this encounter is amplified by how it dovetails with how Hazel has interacted with the arms of the state in her neighborhood before. A community center had "opened up and my mother said she'd increase my allowance if I went and joined because I'd have to get out of my pants and stay in skirts, on account of that's the way things were at the center" (38). The center is established as a place where Hazel encounters the ways in which she is defined by those outside her community: the center not only reifies conventional gender norms but also accentuates Hazel's race and class positions. "[T]hat time I sneaked into the office, that's when I really got turned on. I looked into one of those not-quite-white folders and saw that I was from a deviant family in a deviant neighborhood" (38). Hazel's world is categorized as abnormal by the institutional forces represented by the center and she too takes on this identity by means of belonging to it. The center's enforcement of gender-normative behavior and dress

codes is clearly informed by the paradigm established by the Moynihan report, as communities like Hazel's were framed as culpable for their "deviant" state—and in need of correcting.<sup>35</sup>

Hazel's ambivalence about these definitions is depicted comically: deviant "was my favorite word after that. I ran it in the ground till one day my father got the strap just to show how deviant he could get" (38). In fact, the night she encounters Manny in the park she has been "thrown out of the center for playing pool when I should've been sewing, even though I had already decided that this was going to be my last fling with boy things, and starting tomorrow I was going to fix my hair right and wear skirts all the time just so my mother would stop talking about her gray hairs" (39). Hazel's mother also seems to take up the identificatory models, and vision of aid, offered by the center—she sent Hazel to the center because she "said that I needed to be be'd with and she needed to not be with me"—and thus suggests that several of the primary figures of authority Hazel meets pressure her to conform to these models of self-identification (39). Only Hazel's father, who encourages her desire to become a doctor, seems to stand apart from this matrix of signifying narratives and support her inclination towards exploits coded as less feminine.

The moment of racial solidarity Hazel experiences in the park, which initially seems a bold embrace of black nationhood in the face of institutional racism is ultimately undermined by the combination of the hard and soft power of the state: the over aggression of the police and the subtler ways the state is attempting to manage Hazel's neighborhood. Hazel's initial defiant retorts to the police are followed by a sense of self-righteous anger that her images of the institutional world have been confirmed—"I'll be damned if I ever knew one of them rosy-

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<sup>35</sup> For an account of the defining role deviance discourses have played in U.S. 20<sup>th</sup> century race relations, see *Deviant Bodies: Critical Perspectives on Difference in Science and Popular Culture* edited by Jennifer Terry and Jacqueline Urla and *Constructions of Deviance: Social Power, Context, and Interaction* by Patricia A. Adler and Peter Adler.

cheeked cops that smiles and helped you get to school without neither you or your raggedy dog getting hit by a truck...Not that I ever believed it. I knew Dick and Jane was full of crap from the get-go, especially them cops”—and then by fear, which pushes her away from her initial affiliation with Manny (42). Hazel is quickly flooded with mental images of how this confrontation might play out, a scene of violent death and destruction.

I could see it all, practically crying too. And it just wasn't no kind of thing to happen to a small child like me with my confirmation picture in the paper next to my weeping parents and schoolmates. I could feel the blood sticking to my shirt and my eyeballs slipping away, and then that confirmation picture again; and my mother and her gray hair; and Miss Rose heading for the precinct with a shotgun; and my father getting old and feeble with no one to doctor him up and all. And I wished Manny had fallen off the damn roof and died right then and there and saved me all this aggravation of being killed with him by these cops who surely didn't come out of no fifth-grade reader. But it didn't happen. They just took the ball and Manny followed them real quiet-like right out of the park into the dark, then into the squad car with his head drooping (42)

Hazel's initial outburst of support and communal solidarity gets overpowered by the strength of her fear, which compels a retreat into anomie. Manny is taken off in the squad car and is shuffled through intuitional channels, ending up “in some kind of big house for people who lose their marbles” (42-43).

Hazel's fear is unsurprising for someone so young, despite her rebelliousness. What is perhaps more notable is how this climactic scene is resolved: it is followed by a few concluding lines in which Hazel explicitly disassociates from witnessing the sealing of Manny's fate by turning her attention to “this very boss fashion show at the center” for which “Miss Rose bought me my first corsage—yellow to match my shoes” (43). “I didn't see Manny no more after he got into that squad car,” and she moreover forgets about him. The injustice in the park and the fear it invokes are reinforced by the persuasive expressions of soft power performed by the community center. In this sense, Bambara's story serves as a parable for the insidious influence of the state

and its work in both establishing gender conventions and severing the natural racial bonds of the community.

Black nationalist attempts to transform these communities fares little better in Bambara's fiction from this period. "My Man Bovanne" (1971), for instance, pivots upon the premise that the tactics of Black nationalism disrupt rather than consolidate community. Set at a "benefit for my niece's cousin who's runnin for something with this Black party something or other behind her," the story presents such "Black parties," as dogmatic purveyors of a totalizing ideology that disturbs the organic dynamism of communities (4). In its exclusionary impulse to delineate who was "black enough" from those who were "apolitical" or "Toms," Black nationalism appears as a politics that has "got no use for" those not onboard with its platforms. Bambara embeds a generational critique in this story that demonstrates the type of values she wants to cultivate: the narrator, again called Hazel, though this time middle-aged, widowed, and matriarchal, is highly skeptical of the new black politics her adult children have espoused, because they seem to her to rest on a hypocritical form of radicalism that misunderstands how community actually works. She is critical of the judgmental and exclusionary premises underwriting her children's newfound activism.

Me and Sister Taylor and the woman who does heads at Mamies and the man from the barber shop, we all there on account of we grass roots. And I ain't never been souther than Brooklyn Battery and no more country than the window box on my fire escape. And just yesterday my kids tellin me to take them countrified rags off my head and be cool. And now can't get Black enough to suit 'em (4).

Their depreciation of the role of the elderly and the work of women is especially alarming, because she remembers how they previously respected such figures. The personal implications of their perspective are dramatized by means of the elderly blind man, Bovanne, who used to fix the children's broken roller skates "fore Black Power got hold their minds and mess em around till

they can't be civil to ole folks" (3). Now they see Bovanne as "a Tom," and he is out of place at their benefit.

The children moreover censure Hazel and take her labor for granted as they plan their political strategy: rebuking her that her dress is too short and she is dancing too sensually for a woman of her age, they nonetheless expect her to cook for and develop political allies at their event, without asking beforehand. "While Joe Lee being self-important I'm wonderin who's doin the cookin and how come no body ax me if I'm free and do I get a corsage and things like that" (Gorilla 8). This attitude reflects commitment to conservative gender roles than their widowed mother, who has long been the family head, feels far from comfortable with. "Is this what they call the generation gap?" she asks. "Generation gap,' spits Elo... 'That's a white concept for a white phenomenon. There's no generation gap among Black people'" (6). The Black community that they envision is a unified and homogenous entity in which inner weaknesses, like the "Uncle Tomming" of Bovanne and the matriarchy represented by their mother, have been replaced with a militant version of nation.

Bambara explicitly links this ideological position with the forms of institutional oppression treated in "The Hammer Man." Hazel twice analogizes her children's behavior to police hostility: "Terrible thing when your own children talk to you like that. Pullin me out the party and hustling me into some stranger's kitchen in the back of a bar just like the damn police" (5-6); "them standin there in they pretty clothes with drinks in they hands and gangin up on me, and me in the third-degree chair and nary an olive to my name. Felt just like the police got hold to me" (6). The dogmatism of Hazel's children is thus conflated with the image of alienating and coercive institutional authority.

Hazel does not take much stock in her children's politics or their behavior. She leaves the benefit with Bovanne in tow and takes him home with her, with the intention of giving

the man a nice warm bath...And then a rubdown...And then a massage...Cause you gots to take care of the older folks. And let them know they still needed...Cause old folks is the nation. That is what Nisi was sayin and I mean to do my part. (10)

Mischievously determined to undermine her children's attempts to bind her to their image of middle-aged womanhood as constituted by labor and motherhood, Hazel cheekily flips her daughter's hurtful accusation of promiscuity into a moment of defiance: "I imagine you are a very pretty woman, Miss Hazel." Bovanne tells her. "I surely am,' I say, just like the hussy my daughter always say I was" (10). The story thus ends with a script flip that asserts Hazel's refusal to be defined. Moreover, Bambara's tongue-in-cheek reference to nationhood here upends the version of collectivity offered by the Black Power benefit: Hazel frames nation in overt opposition to ideology and found it on values of respect, presence, tradition, and care. Her gesture of dancing with Bovanne, who is out of place and marginalized at the benefit—"standin there with a smile ready case somebody do speak he want to be ready"—is framed as the ultimate gesture of community (4). While political activism, as in other stories from this collection, appears out of touch with the needs and desires of the people in whose name it purports to act.<sup>36</sup> Nation, Bambara asserts, is people—and it is built on their modes of holding each other together, holding each other up.

It is only when political activism is premised in affirmation and empathy that it becomes a strength to community. For instance, *Seabirds*'s "A Girl's Story" (1977) presents a more responsible form of political activism, which in this case is embodied by Dada Bibi, the head of the local community center, who speaks an unidentified African language, wears a turban, and

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<sup>36</sup> "Playin with Punjab" (1967), for instance.

makes African dresses. Dada Bibi, whose name means “Sister Bibi” in Swahili, emerges as a foil to the severity of the protagonist Rae Ann’s Christian grandmother. The story opens with Rae Ann in crisis—afraid, ashamed, and bewildered by the appearance of her first period—and the predicament illuminates the unconditional support that Dada Bibi offers:

If the shiny-faced woman were here now with her, it wouldn’t be so bad. She’d know exactly what to do. She would sit in the chair and examine Rae Ann’s schoolbooks. Would talk calmly. Would help her. Would tell her there was nothing to worry about, that she was a good girl and was not being punished. Would give an explanation and make things right. (153)

Dada Bibi is repeatedly described as physically darker than others in the story, and she also stands out in Rae Ann’s mind, above all for the way she engages the children that come to the center, because she asks them questions rather than lecturing or reproaching them. It seems like she would hug anyone, Rae notices with amazement, even the dirty kids. “Either Dada Bibi had a powerful health to combat germs...or the woman was crazy” (165).

Here we see a community center of a different variety than the one encountered in “hammer Man”—one that does not seem to be tied to the state but grassroots, and emphasizes African heritage and advocates antiwar sentiment. “Vietnamese were his brothers and sisters, were fighting the same enemy as Black folks” (PP). It serves as a symbol of Black nationalism in Rae Ann’s community and tutors local children in their African heritage. Like the community center that young Hazel attended, it teaches domestic skills and crafts—but it is also more revolutionary in its attitudes toward gender: “Yesterday as they sewed, Dada Bibi told them about some African queen in the old days who kept putting off marriage cause she had to be a solider and get the Europeans out the land and stop the slaving” (153-154). Such lessons frame political obligation as trumping or precluding, rather than requiring, marriage. In this sense,

Dada Bibi instills a commitment to revolution in her young charges in a manner that also supports female empowerment.

Disapproved of by Rae Ann's grandmother—"I ain't nobody's African"—the center thus offers alternative narratives to those Rae Ann encounters at home and at school (162). Indeed, it seems to conceive of black nationalism as in tension with U.S. citizenship and Christianity in a manner that Rae Ann is just beginning to apprehend or appreciate.

Rae Ann had tried to push all they said up against other things in her head. Being American and being proud and they weren't the same in her head. When Dada Bibi talked about Harriet Tubman and them, she felt proud. . . . When the brother who ran the program for the little kids talked about powerful white Americans robbing Africa and bombing Vietnam and doing ugly all over the world, causing hard times for Black folks and other colored people, she was glad not to be American. And when she watched the films about Africans fighting white folks so that hospitals and schools could be built for the kids, and the books about Fanny Lew somebody and Malcolm fighting for freedom, and the posters about the kids, kids littler than her even, studying and growing vegetables and all the print saying how even kids were freedom fighters—she was proud not to be American. What she heard in school pushed up against what was in her head. Then she started looking, just looking in the teacher's bloodshot eyes, looking at M'Dear's fat, looking at Dada Bibi's shiny skin, to decide just how she was going to arrange things in her head. It was simpler to watch than to listen" (162).

The competing identities available to Rae Ann, pushing against each other in her mind, put the terms available to her for identity formation—American, African, Christian—into opposition. Rae Ann does not know how to reconcile their diverging accounts of the world, so she relies on the ways they make her feel. Her grandmother's body, her teacher's tired face, the exotic allure of Dada Bibi's skin, become indices of promises held out to Rae Ann, versions of herself and her future she can choose. But between the pictures of Kwanza and of Jesus "she wasn't sure just who to make the promise to. So she simply addressed. . . .them all" (164).

While Bambara is clearly sympathetic to this multiplication of narratives, the story's account of nation and gender remains problematic. Bambara seems hesitant of the vision of

nationalism presented by Dada Bibi and its presumptions about revolution. Two moments suggest Bambara is calling for a revolution that requires something other than African Queens willing to put battle before marriage. The first occurs when Rae Ann is caught off guard by her brother's concern for her well-being: aware that she has locked herself in the bathroom, he betrays his worry when his voice cracks as he asks if she is alright. Reflecting on this unexpected expression of feeling, which he quickly retracts, and its echo in observations of other men in her life, Rae Ann wonders "[w]hy did it take scarifying to bring out the voice?"—of male vulnerability and expression of care and concern (158). Rae Ann's thoughts frame emotional vulnerability as foundational to heterosexual sexual desire and yet nearly impossible to locate. Bambara gives us another clue about the kind of revolution she imagines when, minutes later, Rae Ann engages in a flight of fantasy premised in images she has seen in movies at the center. She projects herself into a fantastic scene of heroic racial revolt, but in a supporting role, caring for "Brother Hero" as he performs all the tasks of a courageous revolutionary: standing up for kids, fighting cops, shooting businessmen, dying as a martyr. "And she'd be holding his head in her lap, the blood trickling out of the side of his mouth, just like in the movies" (163). This flight of fancy begins as an appealing fantasy, but Rae Ann soon realizes she cannot quite imagine anyone she actually knows into this scene—nor does she want to. She ultimately loses interest in the idea and gives up the daydream. It is clear that for Rae Ann this combative form of revolutionary nationalism offered by Dada Bibi and the center are still missing something about the experience of individuals like Rae Ann, because it does not address their real desires for things like emotional honesty or vulnerability or speak to their need for "revolutionary lives, selves, relationships."

For Bambara, meaningful nationalism instead seems to be founded on communication, discussion, self-determination, and strong interpersonal relationships—which all appear as products of communalism. “The Johnson Girls” (1972), for instance, stages a form of “getting basic” premised in the practices of female friendship and presents group dialogue as a fundamental discursive space for the function of community. The Johnson Girls are a group of more and less “liberated” women who have convened to discuss Inez being suddenly left by her longtime boyfriend. This forum on Inez’s personal crisis becomes a time for organization, meaning-making, and sharing of ideas:

it always winds up to a moment like this when there’s some big thing in Inez’s life and her friends all gather, mostly the in-group. And everybody lays out their program, most times movin on incomplete information cause Inez don’t give up much, so they make up whatever’s missing and then exchange advice and yell at each other’s stupidities and trade stories and finally lay the consensus thing to be done on Inez. Who turns right around and does exactly what she’s going to do in the first damn place. (170)

The narrator, the youngest in the group, is “keepin a notebook on all this, so I wont have all this torture and crap to go through when I jump into my woman stride and stalk out on the world” (174). She traces how the “exchange,” “trade,” argument, planning, and “consensus” characterizing the collective discursive space become a resource enabling Inez to decide “exactly what she’s going to do.” It is less an expression of consciousness raising than an assembly or council meeting for the members of this female community.

The gender politics of this story are polyvocal, interrogative, witty, and elastic. In this sense, the women’s voices seem to reflect the chorus of heterogeneity present in *The Black Woman*. These women have perhaps even read the anthology, as they probe and cross-examine black liberation politics and the rhetoric of feminism in their “plottin” to help Inez save her relationship. “‘Prince? You waiting for a prince? That’s anti-struggle, sister,’ say Gail, and they all crack, ‘counter-revolutionary and just plain foolish. Princes do not come’” (169).

A man, no matter how messy he is, I mean even if he some straight-up basket case, can always get some good woman, two or three for that matter, to go for his shit. Right? But a woman? If her shit ain't together, she can forget it unless she very lucky and got a Great Ma Drew working roots. If she halfway together and very cold-blooded, then maybe she can snatch some sucker and bump his head. But if she got her Johnson together, is fine in her do, Superbad in her work, and terrible, terrible extra plus with her woman thing, well...she'll just bop along the waves forever with nobody to catch her up, cause her thing is so tough, and it's so crystal clear she ain't goin for bullshit, that can't no man pup up his boyish heart good enough to come deal with her one on one. (172)

This lament, which echoes the words of many of the women in Bambara's anthology, problematizes the terms of having one's "Johnson together." As the women offer their various perspectives on how to manage and cope with Inez's dilemma, Inez herself emerges as the most radical and inflexible of the group: "she always maintain that she offers a tax-free relationship—no demands, no pressure, no games, no jumpin up and down with ultimatums. And it usually Gail that spews steam at that juncture, pointing out that that is the heaviest damn pressure of all" (176). The group's conversation reveals that Inez has insisted on a relationship that rejects all the conventional trappings of female love, with the intent of eliminating drama and dependence. But the man who has left her, all agree, "requires super heavy plottin cause he's worth all the trouble that his sulky exit is causin'" (176-77).

And indeed, by the end of the story, the women's conference has enabled Inez to identify her situation as one in which she may have to suspend her own rules in order to affirm and come to terms with her own feelings. The group dialogue, into which she at first interjects very little, gradually makes space for her to become her most authentic and liberated self, because she is not following her preconceived ideas about how she should think or act, which seem to be influenced by her politics, but is instead directed by the situation and her own feelings. This change is facilitated by the discursive community that allows her to locate and reflect on what she wants—which results not in embrace what her friends are saying but in acknowledgement of her own

emotions and their consequences. The practicality, candor, and solidarity offered by the group's dialogue becomes "a hardheaded attempt to get basic with each other" (BW preface).

The story ends on a note of hope about this example of the nation at work:

'O.K.,' said Inez like she never said before and drew her chair up to the suitcase. It halted me in my tracks and Gail looked dumbfounded....and something caught me in my ribs. Love love love love love. We all sat down...I look at Inez and she's sittin so forward I see the tremor caterpillar up her back. And I can't breathe. Somebody has opened a wet umbrella in my chest. And I shudder for me at the preview of things to come. 'O.K.' I say, takin' command. 'Let's first deal with the note.' (177)

As in many of Oates's stories, love here appears to the narrator to have a terrifying power, one which she and the other women must carefully and responsibly guide. Yet Inez's vulnerability is also posed as her strength, as it means she accepts her own feelings and need for support—moving beyond her usual script to embrace a richer version of self-determination that is enabled by community.

Another important expression of this form of everyday nationhood—one that underscores the extent to which Bambara imagines nation as a personalist project—occurs in "The Organizer's Wife" (1977), which depicts the coming to political consciousness of a young woman, Virginia, living in a rural Southern town with "her man" Graham, who is the leader of a community cooperative and school. Graham has been jailed as an "outside agitator," because the cooperative is mounting opposition to the purchasing of the land by a local granite company. In this story, nation is foregrounded as physical space that resonates with the black community members' diasporic past and points toward an aspirational future. Tending to and protecting the land, the site of political contention in the story, becomes an index of the everyday work of shepherding revolution,

this was home. Not a plot of earth for digging in or weeping over or crawling into, but home. Near the Ethiopic where the ancestral bones spoke their speak on certain nights if folks stamped hard enough, sang long enough, shouted. Home. Where 'America' was

sung but meant something altogether else than it had at the old school. Home in the future. The future here now developing. Home liberated soon. And the earth would recover. The rain would come. The ancient wisdoms would be revived. The energy released. Home a human place once more. The bones spoke it. The spirit spoke, too, through flesh when the women gathered at the altar, the ancient orishas still vibrant beneath the ghostly patinas some thought right to pray to, but connected in spite of themselves with the spirits under the plaster. WE CANNOT LOSE, the wall outside the church said. (16-17)

The land's mineral resources, which bear economic value for the granite company, are also superimposed with a symbolic value: the spirit of the ancestral homeland. The land is thus both the physical and the affective foundation for the community, the site of its labor and a reminder of its past and its future. It prefigures, "home liberated soon." Bambara figures this diasporic transnationalism as an intersection of temporalities in the form of an assembly of spirits, who cannot be defeated in their revolutionary desires because they are the foundations of the material community itself: the land upon which it rests.

Against this backdrop, "The Organizer's Wife" tracks Virginia's path to political consciousness after Graham is jailed, a process that traces the transformation of desire for upward mobility—a fantasy of being carried off to a new place, a new life—to her decision to embrace her community. This growth is produced by the toggle between moments of self-reflection, in which she gropes for the words she needs to "speak her speak," and expressions of support from the town, overtures she first experiences as a burden—as "trying to attach her," to oblige her to stay (9).

'Here, Gin,' the woman was saying, 'He a good man, your man. He share our hardships, we bear his troubles, our troubles.' She was stuffing money in between the carry straps, patting the chubby legs as the baby lolled in his cloth carriage. 'You tell Graham we don't forget that he came back. Lots of the others didn't, forgot'...And now the choir woman had given her the money like that and spoken, trying to attach her all over gin, root her, ground her in the place. Just when there was a chance to get free. Virginia clamped her jaws tight and tried to go blank. Tried to blot out all feelings and things—the farms, the co-op sheds. (8-9)

Virginia thus begins in a place of not wanting “to have to ask for nothing... Let some other damn fool break his health on this place, the troubles” (7). Her sense of dislocation and detachment manifest as inability to give shape to her thoughts and feelings. Emotional turmoil over the injustice that Graham and the collective have suffered erupts as “words [that] came bouncing out in a hopeless scatter of tears and wails” (21). But over the course of the story, she comes to be able to speak with self-composure and to generate a plan.

This changes pivots on learning “to speak her speak”—gaining the courage and confidence to articulate her feelings and make sense of herself, a change that pivots on a violent confrontation with the priest who betrayed the community by selling the church’s land to the granite company (20). This encounter becomes a moment of self-actualization when Virginia unexpectedly embodies the community in her address to the priest, by employing a “we” to express her grievances that surprises even herself: “She heard the ‘we ourselves’ explode against her teeth and she fell back... ‘we ourselves’ pushed past clenched teeth and nailed her to the place, a woman unknown” (18). The statement, “propelled by something she had no time to understand,” is a turning point in her own relation to the community; it clarifies a commitment to others tied to a sense of belonging that she had not been conscious of but which her actions and words and nonetheless made known (18). This moment of self-expression becomes an identification of a sense of purpose and a moment of coming to political consciousness. Virginia is possessed by the spirit of nation, watching herself as though from the third person as she fights on behalf of her neighbors and their land. In this transformation, Virginia recognizes that she will stay in the community, that the battle for the land is overlaid with revolutionary meaning. The story ends as she enters the jail to meet Graham, determined, composed, ready to be his political partner as well as his romantic one. “All she wished to tell him was the bail’d been paid, her

strength was back, and she sure as hell was going to keep up the garden. How else to feed the people?" (23). Virginia's embodiment of community becomes the ultimate expression of nationhood. Liberation, she remembers Graham preaching, entails a "discipline, consciousness, unity" that premise revolution in relation (13). This approach founds nation in the toggle between self-determination and community obligation and establishes revolution as both a personal moment and a collective, transnational, cross-temporal project—one requiring men and women to be equal, honest partners.

### **Conclusion: Personalizing Identity Politics**

Oates's and Bambara's early short fiction represent personalist interrogations of a historical moment in which identity politics was reorganizing what inclusion meant and contesting prevailing ideas of togetherness, belonging, and community. Their work helps to elaborate points of overlap and of divergence between personalist concerns and the period's wider politicization of the personal. Oates, for instance, depicts a postwar world of broken connections affording little opportunity to move beyond conventional fantasies of love and gender. Her stories dramatize the struggle between social determinism and independence, and the allure of both self-sufficiency and non-sovereignty, for women attempting to find bearable modes of living out relation to others. Bambara instead emphasizes everyday practices and interpersonal relationships as a vision of identity politics at odds with versions organized by ideology. Her account of black nationhood as something that unfolds through the expressions of social unity already animating communities demonstrates an impulse to personalize identity politics by anchoring it in the complexity of the persons involved.

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