

5-2013

# Imagining Jazzocracy: Notes Toward a new Democratic Subject

Mario Tofano

*Dominican University of California*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.dominican.edu/masters-theses>



Part of the [American Politics Commons](#), and the [Models and Methods Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Tofano, Mario, "Imagining Jazzocracy: Notes Toward a new Democratic Subject" (2013). *Master's Theses and Capstone Projects*. 173.  
<https://scholar.dominican.edu/masters-theses/173>

This Master's Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Capstone Projects at Dominican Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses and Capstone Projects by an authorized administrator of Dominican Scholar. For more information, please contact [michael.pujals@dominican.edu](mailto:michael.pujals@dominican.edu).

IMAGINING JAZZOCRACY:  
NOTES TOWARD A NEW DEMOCRATIC SUBJECT

A culminating thesis submitted to the faculty of Dominican University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts in Humanities

by

Mario Tofano  
San Rafael, California  
April 2013

Copyright 2013- by Mario Tofano  
All rights reserved

This thesis, written under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor and approved by the Chair of the Master's program, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of Humanities in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

Mario Tofano, Candidate

Date 5/8/2013

Dr. Laura Stivers, Chair

Date 5/8/2013

Dr. Christian Dean, Primary Thesis Advisor

Date 5/8/2013

Dr. Mairi Pileggi, Secondary Thesis Advisor

Date 5/8/2013

### Abstract

What does participatory democracy look like? This essay finds an answer in the indigenous art form of the United States—jazz. Political engagement in America must learn from the jazz aesthetic which realizes the communal projects of individuals in concert. After a brief survey of the biological, historical, and cultural formations that construct our political environment this essay advances equaliberty as the foundational concept for the Jazzocrat, the new political subject for tomorrow's participatory democracy.

## Tables of Contents

Head .....	1
Bio-Behavioral .....	4
Contingency, Continuity, Candor .....	9
Consumerism and the Political Industrial Complex .....	17
Imagining Jazzocracy .....	26
Straight, No Chaser Politics .....	29
A Right to the City: a nation teeming with nations .....	32
Coda and Return .....	38
Notes .....	40
References .....	41

## 1. Head

Millennial narratives must replace modern myths. Scrap the symphonic vistas sung by utopians summoning harmony. Embrace the syncopated synthesis of agonistic dialogue in the agora, in the commons, for the commons. Surely ours is a struggle of class and gender and race, a struggle of bodies against violence, a struggle of memory against forgetting. Most hauntingly deprived, most crippled however, is our moral imagination. Let us tell new stories! Let us tell stories our grandchildren will inherit! This essay takes Thoreau's charge by imagining a future unlike our present.<sup>1</sup> Enter the jazzocrat, a young political animal, a moral narrator, an improvisational citizen of tomorrow. This essay will examine the opportunities and limitations concerning the jazzocrat as a biological subject, a historical subject and a cultural subject. My conclusion will posit the jazzocrat as a political subject and imagine the ecological setting in which the jazzocrat thrives: a participatory democracy. Each section will inevitably return to or repeat itself as repetition establishes rhythm, builds upon theme, and reaffirms emphasis.

Before we imagine who the jazzocrat are, we should first ask "Why the jazzocrat?" Reflection on the word itself provokes images of the aesthetic and the political, while implying a particular embodied species living in a specific historical epoch. Jazz music, America's indigenous art of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, provides a multifaceted subject defined by individuality and collectivism: musician/musicians and their individual/communal project. Jazz also establishes a set of rules that govern the behaviors of its performers imbuing them with both liberties and responsibilities. As an individual, a musician has liberties toward expression, association and livelihood, and from censorship, coercion or oppression. Performers also have a responsibility to play solos

and defer to solos, maintain rhythm and harmony, listen for and listen to, compose and comply, contend and concur. The individuals are free to express themselves while also being obliged to do so for the sake of the composition. Involvement and participation are crucial to the enterprise. It is a position of this paper that jazz, like democracy, constitutes a mode of being, a way of being in the world. This paper will explore the political horizons orchestrated by jazz aesthetics.

This essay is an intervention disrupting wilted conceptions of American democracy and offering one version of an alternative story. I refer to the propositions that follow as a narrative for multiple reasons. Narrative is a function of human cognition. We are always in the process of telling stories, reaffirming old stories, or positing new ones (though we may not always be capable of accounting for their birth). Conscious bodies engaging in space, accounting for time, confront the world as an on-going story. This is not to assert that we apprehend the world like an antique camera imprinting static images on film. As interpretive creatures inheriting, negotiating and producing airy meanings, our narrative engagements remain in flux. I will return to the topic of narrative later. Furthermore, by using the terms story and narrative, synonyms for my purposes, I am disclosing the intersubjective as well as normative charge of this exercise. This narrative makes ideological assumptions that would be contradictory to conceal in silent subtext or disguise through rhetorical alchemy. The “I” writing this hopes the “You” reading this will respond in a way that reaffirms a collective “us”, such is the fabric of ideology.<sup>ii</sup> Narratives and meanings can and will change. It is doubtless that a later re-reading will yield a new landscape to terraform, envision and revision constitutes the call and response methodology of democratic practice.

The narrative produced hereafter will espouse the paradox inherent to authentically developing a history from which the imagined future is possible. This essay will build on ambiguity, agonism, and antagonistic cooperation as democratic principles to preserve. It will illustrate Whitman's conviction that America is "not a mere nation but a teeming nation of nations" (Leaves of Grass 1). As my allegiance does not belong to a particular author, useful concepts will be divided from larger theories. However, I would like to emphasize the moral attributes that each theorist contributes to the landscape of jazzocracy. My interpretive practice is pragmatic insofar as concepts will be wielded like tools and references quoted like Bird saluting Stravinsky. This essay will draw from disparate authors and ages, disciplines and data, themes and theories to imagine a new polity. What I have attempted to construct is a jam session of ideas that orchestrate a particular composition concerned with the future of the democratic idea in the United States. Consequently, this essay will depict the paradox of drawing from and shedding tradition, the paradox of private and public space, the paradox of living meaningfully and living morally, the paradox of preserving liberty and amplifying equality, that is, the paradox of politics.

## **2. Bio-Behavioral**

In order to construct the subject from the ground-up, we will begin by discussing the biological and behavioral foundations of the jazzocrat. For Althusser, the subject is always already a subject, that is to say, there is always already an expectation of what a subject is based on the institutionalized knowledges of our time (176). We are animals like other animals, and unique from other animals. To conceal the natural biological capacities of our species would be to ignore the benefits of our evolutionary history, reject the evidence established by various branches of the science community and their method, and project and promote the comfortable delusion that we human beings are something more ethereal or refined and less ‘natural’ than the connotation of the word ‘animal’ allows. This chapter will argue that a bio-behavioral understanding of the human subject is a necessary precursor to constructing an environment fostering our well-being. The mode of being embodied in the jazzocrat is constituted as much by biological limit and potential as it is embedded historically and manufactured culturally. Our condition of embodiment exists as a precondition to our engagement with the world. Bodies shape minds shape bodies.

The jazzocrat, our subject, is a political animal that evolved with a moral imagination. Homo sapiens as well as Homo faber, our species confronts the world pragmatically, thinking when confronted by an obstacle, building to overcome that obstacle. This dialectic of improvisation resides in the fast and frugal heuristics of our brains to survey and respond to our environment largely unmediated (Boyd, “Getting It All” 23). Our capacity for response is predicated on our brain’s continuous construction of schemas—mental frameworks built from extracting familiar elements from

environments to establish expectations. Schemas are an extension of memory built upon sensory perceptions that construct a version of reality that is constantly under revision. Schemas are patterns that we infer from experience which provide us with clear expectations (Levitin 113) and exist to predict and anticipate what will come next to guide behavior (Boyd, "On the Origins" 134).

As our environments include responding to other humans, we also build mental models anticipating human behavior via recognition of personal goals and motives that may drive another's behavior. This capacity for inferring the behavior of another is called theory of mind and it enables us to infer rich quantities of information about another's intentions and desires. That we are pattern organizers may seem irrelevant at this point; however, I intend to show the consequences that follow when schemas influence behaviors within a community. For now it is important to note that our primal capacity for schematic thinking aids us in building a narrative for ourselves in our world.

However, we must be able to relate these judgments to others. After all, we are pro-social animals which means we have an interest in socializing, exchanging, befriending, and cooperating with others. The individual does not exist prior to the community. As Kropotnik exposed, there is no law of each against all as the Hobbesian calculus states (Ridley 4). And before Rousseau's savage claimed land, language developed as a device for social pooling of information in order to warn of present threats or opportunities (Boyd, "On the Origins" 161). As language is an advanced standardized pattern we receive pleasure out of learning it. Our ability to learn language among other things is a result of extended childhoods protected by nurturing parents and a predisposition for imitation. My reasons for this brief introduction in human cognition is

to highlight the relationship between theory of mind, mirror neurons, and cooperation as primal building blocks which anticipate the construction of complex relationships between individuals and communities.

What has made our species so successful is the ability to evaluate dangers and opportunities within the environment and orchestrate towards a common end by preventing danger or pursuing opportunity. Trust is a necessary component to facilitating cooperation, which is established through evidence that one is trustworthy.

Moreover, empathic recognition has also been suggested as a precondition for a fairness principle that maintains the reciprocal altruism and mutual aid that benefits all of us. Reciprocal altruism, the basis of a social contract, is achieved when individuals forego personal short-term pleasures for future long-term successes by working together.

However, when a member of a group reaps an unearned reward, cheats, or defects from the contract by refusing to contribute, the fairness principle established by empathic recognition generates an emotion of displeasure. I'll scratch your back, if you scratch mine. But if I scratch your back, and you refuse to scratch mine, you have cheated me and transgressed the greater social contract. It is my guess that the displeasure of being cheated may contribute to a feeling of cynicism unless the transgressor is punished in some way.

Perhaps the greatest biological reward we have inherited as a result of extended childhoods (Boyd, *On the Origins*" 93) and imaginative perceivers for brains is the affection for play. Play is a set of behaviors in which animals can fine tune skills and explore actions in relatively low risk situations. (Boyd, "On the Origins" 92) During periods of play, we learn the ropes, confront scenarios and practice responses that may

someday aid us under less forgiving conditions. Cognitive and physical play is open ended, the variations to any game are endless, and thus the practical solutions become contextual, unmediated and improvisational. To know a structure—a game—and play by its rules, improvising when need be is adaptation. Improvisation does not occur by breaking rules but by finding opportunity amidst limitation.

However, I do not suggest committing the naturalistic fallacy of equating *is* to *ought*. As prefaced in this section, it would be folly to reject the work done by cognitive and behavioral scientists because of the universality of their assumptions. As de Waal states, “Evolution has produced the requisites for morality: a tendency to develop social norms and enforce them, the capacities of empathy and sympathy, mutual aid and a sense of fairness, the methods of conflict resolution, and so on” (513) but the frameworks we implement are up to us. I recognize that my presentation of the evolutionary development of *Homo sapiens* has neglected sustained discussions of selfish behavior but as Ridley observes we should foster our moral inclinations through social structuring rather than through those we rebuke (260). While our biological capacities lead us to the cosmic crossroads Huxley the elder feared, as his grandson Julian admonished “man can impose moral principles upon the ever-widening areas of cosmic process, in whose further slow unfolding he is now the protagonist. He can inject his ethics into the heart of evolution” (Huxley 507).

The jazzocrats perform their lives as an ensemble playing in a non-zero sum game. That is to say, their cooperation not their competition, drives their common project. Our biological proclivities provide a foundation for the subject of the jazzocrat. In order to explore the many faces of our subject we must next consider our historical

emplacement, that is to say our current temporal location and its relationship to a past of competing accounts that influence our present.

### **3. Contingency, Continuity, Candor**

To position the jazzocrats as contemporary subjects, we must examine the narratives we have inherited to account for our present. At the expense of marginalizing individual social histories, innumerable specific ethnic/geographic/psychological threads woven into the general national tapestry, I will be focusing on the imagined community of The United States of America as a bricolage of pervasive and contradictory narratives from which we jazzocrats derive an account of ourselves. A negotiation takes place in accounting for these contradictions, the contrasting dictions of freedom and slavery, equality and exclusion, justice and discrimination. The national narratives we have inherited constitute the vocabularies with which we frame ourselves and our relationships to our community. To be an authentic democratic subject, one thrown into 21<sup>st</sup> Century America, accounting for ourselves ethically with the vocabularies of our forebears, we must come to terms with the incongruities between our most venerated ideals, liberty and equality, and the casualties concealed by our penitentiaries of shame. To analyze (and possibly preserve) the foundational democratic rhetoric of universal equality for all to pursue life, liberty and happiness in a state of, for, and by the people, the jazzocrats must make transparent those condemned by collective memory. As Butler states, “The ‘I’ can tell neither the story of its own emergence nor the conditions of its own possibility without bearing witness to a state of affairs to which one could not be present” (37). We must bear witness to the anti-democratic legacies, the revisionary prevarications, and indelible injustices that prevent an authentic democratic subject. To tell a new story, to decide what kind of polity, what kind of country to be, we must decide what our history means<sup>iii</sup>.

To do this we must revisit our roots. Jazz music is rooted in the tradition of bearing witness exemplified by the blues. Blues is a music with a memory, a music born out of unfreedom and inequality on the plantations of slavery and in the shadow of Jim Crow. As Langston Hughes character Simple acknowledges, “Bop comes out of dark days” (105). At the heart of blues music is the driving beat or stomp established by a community of listener/ performers keeping rhythm, performing continuity. The heritage of the blues constitutes jazz’s natality as an aesthetic and the genesis of democracy in this country through the communal performance of veracity in the face of conflict. Albert Murray describes the blues idiom as heroic instruction stating “Indeed the blues statement is nothing if not {an} experience-confrontation device that enables people to begin by accepting the difficult, disappointing, absurd...facts of life...even as it does so it also prepares or disposes people to accept the necessity for struggle” (104). A difficult, disappointing, and absurd fact of our condition resides in the erasure of difference manufactured by our Enlightened heirs as promoted through the ideals of liberty and equality. As the stomp establishes communal continuity musically, liberty and equality drive our democratic politics in America.

What do we mean by liberty and equality? Both are invoked often, then casually conceded as invariable truths in our country. Are these principles ahistorical, apriori forms, forming a contract with our past? Or have we sterilized the meaningfulness of liberty and equality by arresting their development, freezing them in a state of ideal inertia. As meaning makers, how should we understand our foundational principles today—as undoubtedly something must have changed in the past two centuries. After hypothesizing the root of this ideal inertia, I will discuss the ways in which liberty has

been used politically to justify inequality, and finally argue that a new principle of equaliberty (drawing from and expanding on Balibar) must be recognized and exercised in order to bear witness to our past while reimagining our future.

We would be foolish to argue that we in America have no contract with the past. Indeed we are preoccupied with the words of our predecessors, praising rhetoric as gospel and searching for guidance in the script of soiled statesmen. However, fear of the unrootedness or atomism of liberalism was an object of primary criticism by conservatives such as Edmund Burke and our own John Adams. The Burkean theory of politics resides in the steady transmission of traditional values through the generations, applying gradual change so that policy is never wholly out of touch with its youngest nor oldest citizens. By this calculus, each generation is bound to one another, forming a national continuity rooted deeply in traditionally held values. It is doubtless that this gradual transmission of values has occurred in America; however, the country problematically began atomistically with the liberal rhetoric of Jefferson in our Declaration of Independence. One critique of liberal atomism is that society becomes deliberately restructured atop a foundation of ideas rather than tried and true traditions. Herein lies a problem; America was founded as an idea atop the lofty ideals of liberty and equality. For over two centuries those ideals have rooted deep in the architecture of the American story, a story transmitted through the generations and pervading our narrative of ourselves. However, atomism attempts to start over, start anew, wash away without bearing witness. Liberty and equality were established as self-evident guiding principles in our new nation before either was universally realized of, by and for the people. Today,

we cling tightly to them while knowing well the contradictions: We have erased difference rather than confronted it.

As such, we have brought a closure of meaning to liberty and equality by tautologizing them, then abandoning them. What is meant by liberty? For Locke, it meant the ability to manage ones actions and possessions, free from restraint and violence from others under the law (147). For Montesquieu, political freedom did not consist of unlimited freedom but the power of doing what we ought will, and not being constrained to do what we ought not will (180). Both theorists prescribe what Berlin calls negative liberty, a definition of liberty that theoretically protects individual preferences by restricting unwanted external intervention by the government or another individual. Berlin also supplies (and later rejects) the concept of positive liberty which may be thought of as an unlimited freedom to choose for oneself as justified by oneself, but could easily extend to choosing for another, as justified by oneself. By sacrificing unlimited positive liberty for a limited negative freedom without external intrusion, the citizenry is said to have been made equal under the law. Equal to pursue individual projects without interference or coercion. Does equality end with this anemic description of a homogeneity of limit? What is meant by equality? Ronald Dworkin advances two principles that make up the ideal of equality: 1) the government treats all those under its charge as *equals*, that is, entitled to equal concern and respect; and, 2) the government treats all those in its charge *equally* in the distribution of some resource of opportunity, or at least works to secure the state of affairs in which they are all equal or more nearly equal in that respect (62). From these two principles Dworkin secures the first as of primary importance; the second, is a derivative of the first. Considering the first principle,

the treatment of citizens with equal concern and respect, Dworkin further refines this principle by considering two theories delineating how government is to treat its citizens as equals. The first theory supposes government is neutral on the question of what a good life is, and how a citizen would lead it; the second theory supposes government needs to have a theory of the good life in order to prescribe it to the citizenry. Ultimately, Dworkin prefers a government neutral on the question of a good life, thus referring back to a concept of negative liberty in which the individual is insulated from externalities. For Dworkin, so long as rough distribution is observed, no preference has been made.

While I accept Dworkin's premises defining the two stated theories guiding the first principle of equality, his assumption that government ought not choose the good due to the diversity of individual preferences is dishonest in its feigned naiveté and immoral in its application. Every vote, every budget, every veto presumes a preference for the good. If we are to accept that government acts simply towards unbiased expediency then we have disemboweled the project of civic duty and sterilized the significance of decision making. I agree with Tavis Smiley's argument that budgets are in fact moral documents as they always affects the flesh and blood lives of embodied subjects. Every decision is a preference defining tomorrow's landscape and accountability for that decision must not be severed or rationalized on behalf of non-partisan judgment.

Governments do intervene in the lives of its citizenry and the advancement of liberty has been used to justify abuses against equality. Let us consider an example in which the Federal government funded (prescribed and endorsed) a project to increase the individual liberty (of some) at the expense of the equality of others. As such, the federal government endorsed an economic good and a socio-economic class over others. This

endorsement occurred in 1956 with the signing of the Federal Aid Highway Act, and the institutionalization of individual automotive transportation. While the interstate highway system was built under the guise of national security, the freeway became a symbol of post-war middle class liberty and prosperity. The freeway “materializes the Anglo-American world view, which saw history as a highway—an unbroken path of linear progress toward distant horizons” (Avila 7). However, the freeway also contributed to a mass exodus (white flight) of jobs and money out of city centers and into suburbs accessible only by automobile. Car ownership was made critical for socio-economic opportunities but still “nationwide, 94% of welfare recipients do not own an automobile,” and recipients can not generate an income to obtain one (Moulding 166). The national decision to promote the automobile without a public option of mass transit has contributed to an indefinite perpetuation of resource inequality. For example, “more than one third of Baltimore-area entry level jobs can only be reached by car...Less than half the jobs in the Cleveland metro area are within an eighty minute commute of the city’s low-income neighborhoods” (Moulding 166). Herein lies a problem: America neglected (and continues to neglect) to invest in a large-scale public mass transit infrastructure that could provide affordable transportation throughout urban and suburban areas for low-income citizens. To return to Dworkin, in order for our government to treat each citizen with equal concern and respect, as his constitutive principle of equality states, we would need to apply his second principle by distributing a resource of opportunity, in this case transportation, to those disadvantaged by the auto industrial complex.<sup>iv</sup> By equalizing the opportunity we will advance equal liberty, a freedom to pursue previously limited opportunities.

As historically emplaced subjects, the jazzocrats must adopt equaliberty as our driving principle: First to confront and correct policy that has actively neglected our citizenry, and then as a tool of progressive prudence. Rousseau acknowledged the importance for legislators to consider equality over liberty as the primary object of good because “liberty can not subsist without it” (228). Without equality, liberty is made preferential. However, neither ideal object of good ought to be subject to individual consideration. As spacetime is woven from a single cosmic cloth, equaliberty describes a democratic relationship acknowledging “that politics is founded on the recognition that neither freedom nor equality can exist without the other, that is, that the suppression or even limitation of one necessarily leads to the suppression or limitation of the other” (Balibar 212). We jazzocrats must use equaliberty as a tool of progressive prudence because the task is, as Balibar states, “always being begun again”(212). Here again we hear Rousseau’s charge that far from being a “chimera of speculation...it is precisely because the force of circumstances is ever tending to destroy equality that the force of legislation should always tend to maintain it” (228). Simple maintenance is not enough however, for equaliberty constitutes an expansion of political agency, not a mere conservation. As Balibar’s second definition states, “Equaliberty implies universality” (212). Universality applies not simply to the present citizenry but also extends to a historical category for future citizenry. Reactionary revisionists may cite secular scripture to limit the inclusion of subjects; however, equaliberty will simply amplify the call-and-response dialogue for which our overlooked amendment system provides for.

And if equaliberty implies universality, then finally, equaliberty implies a universal right to politics (Balibar 212). A right to politics means a right for every woman

and man to participate in defining her or his democracy. Before this right is taken for granted, we should consider the cultural limitations the jazzocrats face and must overcome in order to actively perform their politics.

#### **4. Consumerism and the Political Industrial Complex**

We the people. This simple, elegant, self-evident proclamation serves as an equalizer and unifier of collective identity. These three words contribute to the invention of an imagined community, a uniform nation of individuals under self-prescribed jurisdiction. We the people are often reminded that we are indeed those people described in our constitution's preamble. We the sovereign many from whom the Constitution derives its power. We the governed give consent to those governing. While this forfeiture of political power is efficient in a representative democracy, a dominant hegemonic class is established, consequently creating a division of citizen and state. In conversation our governments become an anonymous "they/them" rather than a "we." The oscillating dance of hegemony, a myriad of push and pull relationships between the governing and the governed is structured through subject positions. These subject positions reflect power relations, authorities, and relationships of opportunity and limitation.

Let us consider a simple version of Althusser's theory of interpellation as the formation of subjecthood. An individual becomes a subject when responding to a declarative "You." Individuals are said to be hailed into subjecthood by this account, as a response requires a recognition of an "I" in relation to another subject. A grammar of positionalities emerges from these relationships. From this assumption, the division between "We" and "They" can be taken as far more disparate and defining of political relationships between the governed and governing. "They" are responsible for producing the legislation "We" consume. If the jazzocrats subscribe to a universal right to politics as claimed above than we ought not position ourselves against governance, for we are governed governors. This is not to assert that governing institutions should not be

opposed or resisted but rather to emphasize that jazzocrat must assume responsibility for our governance.

As we stand, the jazzocrats are limited from claiming a universal right to politics due to the cultural gap between “We” and “They/Them.” In this chapter I will consider the development of this gap, as alluded to above, as a consumer relationship to political commodities. Then I will discuss the peculiar brand of political commodity fetishism that is promoted in mass media demagoguery and disseminated through candidate branding, both of which contribute to an exclusion or closure of political right. Have we the people become insatiable consumers, unwilling participants, nihilists, subjects of the spectacle? Where does individual agency mark these relationships, and how do the jazzocrats overcome their cultural asymmetry?

Consumerism in America, as in other western nations, emerged as a result of the industrial revolution. Industrialist employers demanded a more disciplined condensed work day, wages were increased, credit lines were offered, and so a growing labor force emerged with more leisure time, more discretionary spending and an illusion of social equity linked to buying power. In her masterpiece “A Consumers’ Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America”, historian Lizabeth Cohen traces the inception of two diverging poli-economic subject positions: the citizen consumer and the purchaser consumer. In the 1930s New Dealers invited the “consuming public” to the table with labor and business. Consequently, Americans benefited from an expansion of political agency beyond voting booths and into the private sphere concerned with product quality and labeling standards (Cohen 19). Citizen-consumers used their political rights to protect workers from unfair labor practices and consumers from unregulated pricing

increases through organized boycotting and representation in government. Purchaser-consumers also used their new subjectivity for the benefit of national interest as “conviction grew that consumers held the present and future health of the American capitalist economy in their hands, and what mattered most was aggregate purchasing power, not their right to be protected in the marketplace or to be heard in government chambers” (Cohen 54). The purchaser-consumer was idyllically portrayed by the Chevrolet Motor Company in a movie titled *From Dawn to Sunset* in which the self-sufficient worker spends his hard-earned wage after an honest days work, accompanied by wife and child. The purchaser-consumer would be extolled as a national hero for spending the economy out of depression while reinforcing working-class jobs and elevating ones lifestyle (Cohen 55). These two subject positions would do battle on behalf of the general welfare until after World War II, the point at which America was reborn, by Cohen’s estimate, as a Consumer’s Republic. As she states “Mass consumption in post-war America would not be a personal indulgence, but rather a civic responsibility designed to provide [quoting Time Magazine] ‘full employment and improved living standards for the rest of the nation’”(113). Post-war America brought the convergence of the citizen-consumer concerned with public interest and the purchaser-consumer concerned with aggregate buying power, creating the consumer-as-citizen whose personal, material interests benefit national interests. Cohen views the consumer-as-citizen as the most recent ancestor to the most current subject position of consumer/citizen/taxpayer/voter “where self-interested citizens increasingly view government policies like other market transactions, judging them by how well served they feel personally” (9).

If Cohen's conclusion is correct, and I think that it is, public policy is thought of as a service provided on behalf of a candidate/elect, who is a product manufactured on behalf of a party brand. However, brands are less concerned with their service than with the promotion and preservation of the brand itself<sup>v</sup>. As this is an election year, all are familiar with the barrage of mailers, ads, and donation requests flooding television, email, phones, and front porches. However, these are not invitations to participate directly as a candidate but at best to recruit funds on behalf of a representative. Political participation has been distilled down to campaign donations and casting a ballot.<sup>vi</sup> In the devious aftermath of *Citizens United*, money talks.

Our consumer-based economic polity, a separation of "We" and "Them", is a product of what Cornel West denounces as nihilism in America. When referring to nihilism, Brother West refers to the desecration of political values in favor of market values. Nihilism indicates an amorality as worshipped in the "invisible hand of the market." But amorality is immorality when decisions affect the lives of people.

Our politicians sell "appealing lies" rather than "uncomfortable truths" (West 28) banking on the public buying their brand. Democracy requires an informed electorate, but in an era of government opacity, a free and frank press must fulfill its charge as public watchdog. "While an essential mission of the news organizations in a democracy should be to expose the lies and manipulations of our political and economic leaders—and surely many media watchdogs devote themselves to that task—too much of what passes for news today is really a form of entertainment" (West 36). The amorality perpetrated by some, often the most popular news sources, represents what West considers "sentimental nihilism" or "the dominance of sentiment over truth telling in order to build up market

share” (36). Purveyors of sentimental nihilism have not only diluted their professional ethic by providing infotainment in order to generate higher ratings which in turn bring corporate sponsorship and higher earnings, but have contributed to perpetuating the divisive partisan branding embedded in our two-party politics.

Nihilism in America generates a political commodity fetishism in which politics as a community pursuing its collective destiny through deliberation and dialogue is replaced by sound bites, tag lines, colors, mascots and ultimately brands.<sup>vii</sup> We see the merging political industries and culture industries. I will preface this section by acknowledging that not all Americans subscribe to party politics or mass media outlets, as many resist. However, those who resist do so in the periphery and must also resist dominant masses subscribing to branding. What are the differences between the two major party brands? Let us remember that branding is invaluable because the manufacturing or sale of a product is marginalized by the metaphysical value of the brand itself. Klein reminds us that “Brands [can] conjure a feeling...that entire corporations could themselves embody a meaning of their own” (7).

The Republican and Democratic Parties are themselves corporations that theoretically deal in policy as their product. So what are their political platforms? Let us consider their differences by looking at how each party defines its platforms on their respective official websites. At [Gop.org](http://Gop.org), on the issue of energy independence, the Republican Party has this to say: “We believe in energy independence. We support an “all of the above” approach that encourages the responsible production of nuclear power, clean coal, solar, wind, geothermal, hydropower, as well as drilling for oil and natural gas in an environmentally responsible way. We oppose so-called cap and trade legislation

that would impose a national energy tax on families and small business that would kill jobs and raise utility prices.” At Democrats.org, the Democratic Party had this to say on the same issue: “President Obama knows we can’t just drill our way to lower gas prices or a quick-fix solution to our energy needs. That’s why he and Democrats are focused on developing all of America’s natural resources—domestic oil, gas, wind, solar and biofuels—and encouraging fuel efficiency so that we can reduce our dependence on foreign oil over time.” At each site, platforms have been distilled into easy to remember paragraphs (69 words at Gop.org, 58 words at Democrats.org) which in many cases, like energy policy, are ambiguous mirror images.<sup>viii</sup> Of course in our era of political branding, policy planning or its realization is less important than the brand itself. Branding is perpetuated by advertising, and in the advertising world “the more you spend, the more your company is worth.” (Klein 8). In 2008, the total amount spent by all candidates, parties and PACs in federal elections was approximately \$5.3 billion (\$5,285,680,883).<sup>ix</sup> In the shadow of the 2010 *Citizens United* and *SpeechNOW* decisions by federal courts leading to the triumph of unlimited campaign finance expenditure, the current 2012 election cycle is anticipated to be the most profitable/costly season yet as the two major parties have collectively raised and spent nearly one billion dollars as of August 7<sup>th</sup> (Spending: Democratic \$451,932,895; Republican \$315,338,614).

But underneath the money, where do the politics exist? Perhaps it exists in the campaign slogans of the Presidential race. Building on the “Change” campaign of 2008, President Obama’s campaign advertises “Forward”, an invocation of the seductive rhetoric of development, perseverance, and progress. Mr. Romney advertises “Believe in America”, a slogan incorporating a presumed essence of America mixed with the notion

that a vote elsewhere would be counterproductive to the nation. Progress versus Conservation. These slogans are meant to generate an emotional connection between a thing, a personality, and an idea. Like advertisements, the slogan promotes taking the sign for the signified, the product (in this case a candidate) for the feelings generated (Williamson 12). Furthermore, the campaign ads rely on differentiation of brands, not services, they are negatively defined concepts whose “most precise characteristic is that they are what the others are not” (Williamson 27).<sup>x</sup>

In the realm of politically sponsored media, the two highest rated cable news sources, Fox News and MSNBC, reproduce political demagoguery by packaging news products that represent the interests of each brand. Each source specializes in the repetition of slogans, video clips taken out of context, and phony pundit interrogation that creates for the audience what Meerloo defined as semantic fog—the use of words to seduce or charm, frighten or hypnotize, invoke a conditioned response (136). Recall the role that type 1 errors have in channeling a cautious suspicion. A free press uncorrupted by sentimental nihilism and market values would ideally be the vanguard for *parrhesia* in order to hold institutions accountable and contribute to a well-informed population. Brother West argues, as Jefferson did before him, that “there can be no democratic *paideia*—the critical cultivation of an active citizenry—without *parrhesia*—a bold and courageous press willing to speak against the misinformation and mendacities of elites” (39). West longs, as do I, for the presence of frank journalism in mass media but thanks to the Internet, lesser known *parrhesiastes* such as Amy Goodman, Glen Greenwald and Chris Hedges among others still have vocal mobility.

Political commodity fetishism occurs when one's politics is no longer defined by political issues (not to mention action) but rather is defined by what television channels, newspapers, or pundits one subscribes to. The product becomes the right, and those manufacturing it become the definers of the right. Political and sentimental nihilism is so dangerous to democracy because brands promote a closure of meaning by providing a teleology by tautology, as means and ends are defined in their own image. In marketing as well as partisanism, customers are to be wooed from the cradle to the grave. This closure of meaning remains hidden, a cavity undisclosed, beneath a veneer polished regularly to present a familiar newness. "What parades as progress in the culture industry, as the incessantly new which it offers up, remains the disguise for eternal sameness" (Adorno 104).

The political industry, like the culture industry, makes up only one half of a circuit of information that it generates. The other half belongs to the audience, consumers, to we the people. This hegemonic relationship never reaches a point of stasis in which the dominant producers simply manipulate the subordinate consumers. Communication has no necessary one to one value translation, messages lack symmetry, and so the receiver/consumer of a message is responsible for decoding the content (Hall 54). While dominant producers such as the sentimental nihilists of Fox News or MSNBC, can code a message in line with the repetitious semantic fog they generate, and by doing so "pre-fer" a dominant decoding, viewers may respond with an oppositional decoding of the message. As meaning-makers, We can resist, reappropriate, and reassign values to the language we use. We are not cultural dupes, incapable of seeing through the dishonesty

of nihilism in America, but the market-driven polity is filled with industries trying to dupe the culture.

It is a fact that we in America are consumers, but as consumers we are also producers. As stated in the previous chapter, we must bear witness to the unappealing truths of our condition in order to reimagine our future. Democracy must not be bastardized into the choice between brands that colonize, monopolize and seek to close the nation's semantic space. The jazzocrat must resist playing the perfect fifth, the note to close all notes, the final word to end the dialogue. A universal right to politics, a right the jazzocrat demands, requires an ever-present open-endedness of meaning generated by the free play of ideas. If we are to become "We", the jazzocrat must reclaim responsibility as governed governors. We must not limit our participation to donations and votes during the election cycle but rather perform our politics.

## **5. Imagining jazzocracy**

We jazzocrats must perform our politics. A performance requires both space and audience. Without a designated space, a jazz quartet has no place to display the craft it has cultivated. Quartet members have no place to disclose themselves. And without an audience, they have no one to disclose themselves to, no one to communicate their message with. For a performance is a discourse requiring a setting and interlocutors who also participate in the performance through a sustained response. To disclose oneself is to make oneself available to critique, and criticism is a role played both internally amongst the group as well as externally amongst the audience. Here we have the pre-conditions for jazzocracy analogous to our democratic forebears of Ancient Greece. The existence and preservation of public space into which political performers emerged for dialogue, debate and deliberation was the cornerstone of Athenian democracy. As individuals in concert toward a common destiny, an understated fact of human existence, public space exists as a location of full disclosure, “a place seen and heard by everybody...the world itself, common to all of us and distinguished from our privately owned place in it” (Arendt, “The Human Condition” 52). The public commons are necessarily a world of plurality for a communal experience among individuals is constituted by its very existence. But the public commons have been largely siphoned off to private interests spreading the homogeneity of corporatism across municipalities like salting the earth. As political animals, the jazzocrats require an ecology to flourish in, we require a space to cultivate as our own.

I will begin by discussing what a universal right to politics means for the jazzocrat then discuss how the orchestration of a right to the city fueled by antagonistic cooperation is a necessary step toward reimagining our democracy.

Let us take the Aristotelian notion that politics, the action of a political community, aims at developing an environment in which people “are most able to realize their ideal life.”<sup>x</sup> Political action then is to participate in creating one’s ideal life. It is an act of self-determination and self-description. As Arendt argues, “In acting and speaking, men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world” (Arendt, “The Human Condition” 179). For Arendt, as also for the Ancient Greeks, political action is constituted through the revelatory courage of disclosing oneself through action and speech in public. Solitary acts can not be self-defining for “to be isolated is to be deprived of the capacity to act” (Arendt, “The Human Condition” 188). Action then is predicated on the plurality of human existence, the presence of people both equal to and distinct from one another. People are equal when they can hear, understand and communicate with and for one another, and through this equality we can distinguish ourselves as unique individuals through speech and action (Arendt, “The Human Condition” 175-6).

A universal right to politics is not simply a right to suffrage but a right to appear in the human world, undisguised and unashamed, insistent on creating one’s life through speech and action. This does not mean beyond criticism or reproach. Through antagonistic cooperation, that is to say the debate and deliberation between equals, the political community can pursue its collective destiny. Jazzocracy should be mobilized by negotiating through contentious perspectives. A model of the progressive struggling

embodied by jazzocracy was exercised by Composer-bassist Charles Mingus and his band the Jazz Workshop. “Thriving on the principle of creative struggle, the Workshop created unruly music...Mingus’s aesthetic implied that jazz composition was an on-going process, fraught with the high drama of virtuosos contesting one another” (Saul 149).

Here we see that equaliberty (as expressed by the Jazz Workshop) provides the opportunity (kairos) for acts of positive freedom. Indeed as Saul explains, “Mingus understood freedom not as freedom from coercion (Isaiah Berlin’s classic definition of negative liberty), but as a sphere of musical action governed by the push and pull of the Workshop dynamic. His freedom was collective action with traction: it came about when the community of the Workshop—“these seven men set to free themselves in music”—negotiated the initial rules set up by Mingus the composer” (159). Just as an individual can only distinguish themselves amidst equals, acts of individual liberty can only be meaningful within a structure of equaliberty. Equality is the structure through which acts of liberty can be defined. Improvisation is only possible within the context of constraint. The relationship between performers is equal because each is given the opportunity to solo. This opportunity is an acknowledgment of dignity. Soloing is not simply the regurgitation of notes or sight reading of lines (or stock policy positions) but an expression of the performer themselves fully exposed to their band and an audience. The relationship between performers is one of antagonistic cooperation, for they challenge each other’s expression with their own, competing through the free play of ideas and “giving form and order in a mobile environment, where choices must be constantly assessed and reacted to in one way or another” (Crouch 175).

I have tried to illustrate what a universal right to politics may create for jazzocracy, namely the universal participation of voices engaged in the free play of ideas advancing towards a collective destiny. Up to this point, the naïve nationalist may shrug with boredom at the perceived precision with which a jazzocracy simply describes the current American Republic. Unlike our Republic however, jazzocracy is predicated on participation rather than representation. As stated above, our politics must be constituted through action and speech in public. By conveniently appointing representatives we forfeit our right to politics as soon as our ballots are cast.<sup>xii</sup> We contribute to the separation of “We” and “Them”, a false dichotomy reliant on the bizarre inversion of identity in which the private is disclosed and the political is concealed.<sup>xiii</sup> Our negative liberty from political action has reproduced Ibsen’s Doll House Syndrome from which “in eight years we have not exchanged one serious word about one serious topic” (140). How then ought we reinvest ourselves in politics? We must commit ourselves diligently and vigilantly to performing straight no chaser politics at an acutely local level. Jazzocracy must strive to establish the forgotten dream of Jeffersonian democracy—the ward system.

### **5.1 Straight, No Chaser Politics**

Far from being a community of capitulated consensus, jazzocracy requires the dissonance of dissidents willing to speak with the frank and fearless vulnerability of parrhesia. Our democratic ancestors in Athens defined parrhesia as an act of truth-full speech appearing in public (agora) which constituted a requisite for participation. Just as the soloist must display her or him self note by note to the audience so too must the

jazzocrat speak freely at the risk of unpopularity to a general assembly of peers. As has been argued, there is an inherent risk to political action, to stepping into public beyond the confines of a private safehaven and defining oneself to the common world. However, to take responsibility for defining ones world and to work alongside others in achieving this project, truth-telling must supersede convenience or fear. As Foucault informs us, there is always a sense of danger in the act of parrhesia, however, “in parrhesia, telling the truth is regarded as duty...the speaker uses his freedom and chooses frankness instead of persuasion, truth instead of falsehood or silence, the risk of death instead of life and security, criticism instead of flattery, and moral duty instead of self-interest and moral apathy” (5).

Imagine a neighborhood gathering together to discuss whether a Wal-Mart should be permitted to move into the community. Facilitators of the business deal live in the area and have gathered the support of many others under the promise that the mega-store will bring much-needed jobs to the community. A jazzocrat speaking in parrhesia would argue that while employment may rise, many local businesses would be suffocated, the aesthetic diversity of the neighborhood would be scarred by the homogeneity of the superstore, and the internal semantic space of the neighborhood would be closed in favor of external private interests. Such a response should provoke a debate about what type of community the people want to be, what it means to be a community, and from that debate a new set of commitments, collaborations, consolations, and contests. This is the nature of improvisational politics, which is to say courageously experimental. “In this sense, democracy is more a verb than a noun—it is more a dynamic striving and collective movement than a static order or stationary status quo” (West 68). The Zapatista (EZLN)

movement in Chiapas, Mexico provides a primary example of the successful implementation of participatory democracy and the constitution of a community of governed governors. In Zapatista communities, citizens are elected on a rotating basis of about 8 days to the Juntas de Buen Gobierno (Good Government Councils) to learn and participate in community governance, which serves to reproduce civic interest while undermining and abolishing a governing class.

“Where conventional politics is practiced “from above” by professional politicians who are expected or assumed to be “experts”, who are practiced at public speaking and image management and exercising authority, who are recognized as individuals of rare and exceptional ability, and who are, without question, paid for their service, the Juntas, both in theory and in practice undermine all of this. Chosen by their communities to serve unpaid, expected to learn on the job regardless of their ability to read or write or even to speak Spanish, expected to share decision-making power and to step down when asked, and held to an ethical standard in which their decisions must reflect the greater good of the community with no sectarian advantage or will for personal gain, members of the Juntas are precisely the opposite of what convention says the politician must be” (Conant 285).

The repetition of the word “expected” highlights the duty each individual has to reproducing the world they pursue common projects in. Each member of a jazz group has a duty to both reproduce the rhythm and melody for each other as well as solo when the opportunity presents itself. To opt out is to dissolve the project by which an individual

can be defined as unique. To opt out is to refuse to replenish the benefits one has enjoyed. To opt out is to contribute to an unsustainable system. A jazzocrat must jam in order to solo. The improvisational politics of a jazzocrat mean nothing removed from the community they are performed within. A jazzocrat performs to regenerate the community that provides an opportunity for the realization of individual/collective projects. As such the collective identity corresponds to the myriad individual identities of the community. Jazzocracy is a perpetual dialogue occurring between the individual and the community, a generative dialogue with ecological effects on the destinies of all involved.

We may pause to ask, “But what of the representatives?” What use does such an outdated mode of communication have in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century? With daily advancements in telecommunication and social networking, why ought a particular official need to travel to a capitol in order to voice the peoples will? Why not transfer the salaries representatives are paid to be split amongst every member of the community—a humble payment to each member for participating in governance.

Jazzocracy requires participatory democracy with parrhesiates and interlocutors, performers and audience engaged in a call and response dialogue in the commons, for the commons. All that is left is space. A universal right to politics, to defining one’s world, implies a right to the production and reproduction of space.

## **5.2 A right to the city: a nation teeming with nations.**

Imagine a city without a population. The streets barren, the commercial buildings empty, the homes uninhabited. Structurally we may still call the abandoned edifice a city, for its potential to resume habitation would be intact. But for this purpose, it could just as

easily satisfy its potential as ant colonies or pigeon perches. What I hope to have elicited is a rather provocative fact which is taken for granted: the city is but an extension of the inhabitants who reproduce it. Ruins constitute decay due to the deprivation of reproduction. They are sedentary, inert, alienated from revitalizing newness. The Greeks recognized this relationship as the name of a polis corresponded to a notion of the people, not their infrastructure. “Whose streets are these,” the *Reclaim the Streets* slogan demands “Our Streets!”

This leads me to my final claim on behalf of the principle of equaliberty, which is, a universal right to politics demands a right to the city. A right to the city is the ultimate right regarding political autonomy of the governed governors—it is in fact what political action is concerned with at a fundamental level. A city is not a geographic location we live above, nor is it a complex of private properties that some inhabit. A city is the ecological commons in which human flourishing is pursued. As such, each neighborhood ought to reflect the common destiny of the inhabitants politically and aesthetically. Jazzocracy as a mode of being in the world, a practice of political action and collective determination must be cultivated at the most local levels, beginning with individuals in concert toward the use of their own neighborhoods. By preserving and perpetuating democratic autonomy at the local level building from neighborhood to town to city to county to state to region and finally to the Union as a whole, a checks and balances system insulates the commitments of a neighborhood from misrepresentation at a federal level.

Indeed, this was the forgotten dream of Thomas Jefferson and his conceptualization of a ward system in which “ ‘the subdivision of counties into wards’,

namely, the creation of ‘small republics’ through which ‘every man in the State’ could become ‘an acting member of the Common government, transacting in person a great portion of its rights and duties...’” (Arendt, “The Revolutionary” 243). Jefferson’s dream was to protect the democratic spirit by making everyone feel “that he is a participator in the government of affairs, not merely at an election one day in the year, but everyday; when there shall not be a man in the State who will not be a member of some one of its councils, great or small” (Arendt, “The Revolutionary” 244). While Jefferson is unclear as to how large he envisions these wards, he alludes to populations of no more than a hundred where “ ‘the voice of the whole people would be fairly, fully, and peaceably expressed, discussed, and decided by the common reason’ ” (Arendt, “The Revolutionary” 239-240).

A right to the city divided into wards contributes to a mass decentralization of power in favor of greater accountability. Our communities become the public commons. We who produce and reproduce the world have a right to design that world not simply labor on its behalf. David Harvey argues that a right to the city has the potential to mobilize massive political classes as a creative force for re-articulating communities (138). By giving the people a stake in our communities, an increase in pride and responsibility would develop. Indigenous politics would grow in every ward and communities would grow and change to reflect the identities of those living in them. Organic constitutions constituting the wills of the present, neither unrecognizable to the oldest nor unintelligible to the youngest.

The ideal results are neither utopian nor are they unprecedented. An indigenous politics would contribute to a moral turn inward which by extension would aid an

empathic recognition of issues facing external communities. “The turning inward of Zapatista communities, the clear need to attend to the development of autonomous infrastructure, led to some stunning advances...the first ten years of the uprising had seen the construction of 800 community health centers, 300 schools, eighteen clinics, and two hospitals within rebel territory” as well as the training of educators and health promoters all established without State money (Conant 283-84). Here we see the recognition and realization of community services addressing community needs. Similar examples are prevalent in the U.S. manifested by Community Development Corporations (CDCs) such as the Bedford-Stuyvesant (Bed-Stuy) Restoration Corporation, a community based non-profit which provides start-up loans to small business, property renovation, training programs, and which has provided thousands of new jobs to the community (Alperovitz 100). The CDC acts to facilitate a cyclical appropriation and distribution of wealth within the community so that a percentage of money made is filtered back into community development.

In Porto Alegre, Brazil’s tenth most populous city (approx 1.5 million residents), residents engage in participatory budgeting once a year. Through a cycle of assemblies beginning at the neighborhood level and ending with a city-wide vote, residents identify various problems facing their communities and discuss strategies to solve these problems with budget officials and public servants. At the end of the cycle, a vote is taken and funds are allocated based on the vote. As a result, political participation has increased and residents become cognizant of the process of urban management. Participatory Budgeting in Porto Alegre doesn’t perfectly reflect the autonomy implied by a universal right to

politics in a jazzocracy, however it does provide an example of radical reform by which residents are able to actively perform their politics.

The three previous examples were chosen to illustrate comparatively the ways in which communities can begin to claim their right to the city at varying levels of collaboration with the State. While the Zapatistas represent a paragon of participatory democracy radically at odds with the State, the participatory budgeting of Porto Alegre should inspire new political demands from citizens that act as a necessary first step toward achieving more political autonomy. A right to the city constituted by a universal right to politics as implied by a principle of equaliberty should not undermine itself by thinking large-scale structural change with revolutionary implications requires revolutionary means with immediate results. Consumer convenience and violent overzealotry have no place in the ecology of jazzocracy. Kairos is created in the silences between notes and actions. However, by addressing issues facing many communities today, a large political class may mobilize and organize towards achieving a right to the city. David Harvey seems to resist the idea that reform hinders revolution when stating “In the same way that Marx depicted restrictions on the length of a working day as a first step down a revolutionary path, so claiming back the right for everyone to live in a decent house in a decent living environment can be seen as the first step towards a more comprehensive revolutionary movement” (137).

Indeed, in a country with about 18 million vacant homes it would be revolutionary to house the some odd 640,000 homeless and keep those near homeless in homes with a moratorium on foreclosures.<sup>xiv</sup> Once again it is not unprecedented for both autonomous community groups in accordance with or against the State to address the issue of

homelessness. Through anti-eviction campaigns and the physical occupation of bodies in foreclosed homes, groups such as Occupy Our Homes resists State enforcement of foreclosures on behalf of banks. In the non-profit sector, Community Land Trusts ought to be established to lease land at affordable rates to low-income people and combat the gentrification of low-income communities.

A jazzocrat demands a right to the city because jazzocracy is ultimately concerned with the amplification of human flourishing promoted by the principle of equaliberty. By introducing the notion of Jefferson's ward system I hoped to reimagine the practice of democracy in America as envisioned by one of its founders. As jazzocracy is a mode of being in the world, we must restructure our relationships to our community and our right to defining it both personally and collectively.

## **6. Manifesting our vision, Telling a new story, Playing a new tune: Coda and Return**

Millennial narratives must replace modern myths. We must mobilize our moral imaginations to tell alternative stories about the type of people we want to be. These stories must be richer in diversity of interest, variegated in possibility, and resistant to inertia. We must tell each other our stories for we are emplotted together. Our vocabularies must progress beyond the market-driven vernacular of neo-liberalism: Discourse not exchange; intercourse not transaction. Through the free play of ideas in concert comes the advancement of identities in dialogue: competing, colliding, copulating, and collapsing.

We must keep our humanity in mind. We are embodied, always embodied, always hearts beating, stomachs growling, space requiring. Meanwhile our corporations are gluttonous. They feed on our quest to create meaning. They feed on us. Let us challenge our justices opinions. Starve them. They are not people; they will not expire.

We must confront a past steeped in racial and sexual inequality. In the struggle of memory against forgetting, we must admit not omit. From the tradition of bearing witness, a struggle of renewal without revenge, we must admit all who wish to perform for equaliberty constitutes a universal right to politics. A right to be present and exposed.

Tell new stories of assembly, beyond the granfaloonyism of party brands. Democrats how? Republicans when? Demagogues both. Products for consumption tailoring tones and timbres to be agreeable, apolitical. Apologists incentivizing immorality. Expect more, become more. We must perform our politics. Our equaliberty must challenge the vacuous verbiage of principles. Our universal right to politics must cultivate and mobilize frank and fearless speech. We have a right to voice and name, our

city, our world, as we reproduce it for future generations. We have a right to freely assemble our cities, the living constitution of voices and actions.

Let us embrace reproach, for the newness of relationships and ideas are always volatile, disruptive—a challenge to the rigid status quo of meanings. We must discuss and decide, argue and act, we must envision and revision, mend and amend, we must experiment and improvise, consent and contend, and we must perform the story we want to tell about ourselves. Ours is an open-ended story, an ethic not ending, for there will always be something to talk about, something to address, a struggle to overcome. As equals collectively articulating our common destiny, horizontal in orientation, our notes soar vertically.

## References

- Adorno, Theodor W. "Culture Industry Reconsidered." *Popular Culture: A Reader*. London: Sage Publications, 2009. 103-08. Print.
- Alperovitz, Gar. *America beyond Capitalism: Reclaiming Our Wealth, Our Liberty, and Our Democracy*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2006. Print.
- Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses(Notes towards an Investigation)." *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses by Louis Althusser 1969-70*. N.p., n.d. Web. <<http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1970/ideology.htm>>.
- Arendt, Hannah, and Margaret Canovan. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1998. Print.
- Arendt, Hannah. "Hannah Arendt: The Revolutionary Tradition and Its Lost Treasure." *Liberalism and Its Critics*. New York: New York UP, 1984. 239-63. Print.
- Avila, Eric. "The Folklore of the Freeway: Space, Culture, and Identity in Postwar Los Angeles." *Aztlan: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 1st ser. 23 (1998): 13-31. Print.
- Balibar, Etienne. ""What Is a Politics of the Rights of Man?"" *Balibar on the Rights of Man*. N.p., n.d. Web. <<http://www.generation-online.org/p/fpbalibar1.htm>>.
- Berlin, Isaiah. "Isaiah Berlin: Two Concepts of Liberty." *Liberalism and Its Critics*. New York: New York UP, 1984. 15-36. Print.
- Boyd, Brian. "Getting It All Wrong." *The American Scholar*. N.p., 2006. Web.

<<http://theamericanscholar.org/getting-it-all-wrong/>>.

Boyd, Brian. *On the Origin of Stories: Evolution, Cognition, and Fiction*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap of Harvard UP, 2009. Print.

Butler, Judith. *Giving an Account of Oneself*. New York: Fordham UP, 2005. Print.

Cohen, Lizabeth. *A Consumer's Republic*. New York (N.Y.): Vintage, 2003. Print.

Conant, Jeff. *A Poetics of Resistance: The Revolutionary Public Relations of the Zapatista Insurgency*. Edinburgh: AK, 2010. Print.

Crouch, Stanley. *Considering Genius: Writings on Jazz*. New York: Basic Civitas, 2007. Print.

De Waal, Frans. "Good Natured: The Origin of Right and Wrong in Humans and Other Animals." *Darwin: Texts Commentary*. Ed. Philip Appleman. New York: Norton, 2001. 511-17. Print.

Dewey, John. "Creative Democracy-The Task before Us." *The Pragmatism Reader*. Ed. Robert B. Talisse and Scott F. Aikin. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2011. 150-54. Print.

Dworkin, Ronald. "Ronald Dworkin: Liberalism." *Liberalism and Its Critics*. New York: New York UP, 1984. 60-79. Print.

Foucault, Michel. "Discourse and Truth: The Problematization of Parrhesia." *Michel Foucault, Discourse and Truth: The Problematization of Parrhesia*. N.p., n.d. Web. <<http://foucault.info/documents/parrhesia/>>.

- Hall, Stuart. "Encoding/Decoding." N.p., n.d. Web. <<http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/irvinem/theory/sh-coding.pdf>>.
- Harvey, David. *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*. New York: Verso, 2012. Print.
- Hughes, Langston. "Langston Hughes: Tales of Simple." *Black Voices*. London: Signet Classics, 2001. 96-112. Print.
- Huxley, Julian. "Evolutionary Ethics." *Darwin: Texts Commentary*. Ed. Philip Appleman. New York: Norton, 2001. 503-07. Print.
- Ibsen, Henrik. *A Doll's House*. N.p.: Plain Label, 1960. Print.
- Klein, Naomi. *No Logo*. London: Flamingo, 2001. Print.
- Levitin, Daniel J. *This Is Your Brain on Music: The Science of a Human Obsession*. New York, NY: Dutton, 2006. Print.
- Locke, John. "Locke: The Social Contract State." *The Development of the Democratic Idea: Readings from Pericles to the Present*. New York: New American Library, 1974. 142-78. Print.
- Merloo, Joost A.M. *The Rape of the Mind: The Psychology of Thought Control, Menticide, and Brainwashing*. New York: Universal Library, 1971. Print.
- Montesquieu. "Montesquieu: The Defense of Liberty." *The Development of the Democratic Idea: Readings from Pericles to the Present*. New York: New American Library, 1974. 179-96. Print.

Moulding, Patrick. "Note: Fare or Unfair? The Importance of Mass Transit for America's Poor." *Georgetown Journal on Poverty Law & Policy* (2005): n. pag. Print.

Murray, Albert. *The Hero and the Blues*. New York: Vintage, 1995. Print.

Ridley, Matt. *The Origins of Virtue: Human Instincts and the Evolution of Cooperation*. New York: Viking, 1997. Print.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. "Rousseau: The Social Source of Freedom." *The Development of the Democratic Idea: Readings from Pericles to the Present*. New York: New American Library, 1974. 198-253. Print.

Sandel, Michael J. *Liberalism and Its Critics*. New York: New York UP, 1984. Print.

Saul, Scott. *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain't: Jazz and the Making of the Sixties*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2003. Print.

Sehgal, Kabir, and Douglas Brinkley. *Jazzocracy: Jazz, Democracy, and the Creation of a New American Mythology*. Mishawaka, IN: Better World, 2008. Print.

Sherover, Charles M. *The Development of the Democratic Idea: Readings from Pericles to the Present*. New York: New American Library, 1974. Print.

Viereck, Peter. *Conservatism: From John Adams to Churchill*. Princeton, NJ: Van Nostrand, 1956. Print.

West, Cornel. *Democracy Matters: Winning the Fight against Imperialism*. New York: Penguin, 2004. Print.

Whitman, Walt, and Malcolm Cowley. *Leaves of Grass: The First Edition 1855*. New

York: Barnes & Noble, 1997. Print.

Whitman, Walt. *Democratic Vistas, and Other Papers*. Amsterdam: Fredonia, 2002. Print.

Williamson, Judith. *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising*.  
London: Boyars, 1978. Print.

## Acknowledgements

This thesis was made possible by the support of my parents and my sister, the tender encouragement of Molly, the challenging inquisitions by Scotty who once demanded “Summarize your paper in 5 words” and the patience and insight of Professor Christian Dean and Professor Mairi Pileggi.

## Notes

---

<sup>i</sup> In *Civil Disobedience*, Dover Thrift, p.2, Thoreau adjures the American citizenry “Let every man make known what kind of government would command his respect, and that will be one step toward obtaining it”.

<sup>ii</sup> Althusser’s *Ideology and the State*, p. 173, discusses the eternal nature of ideological transmission transforming individuals into subjects via interpellation.

<sup>iii</sup> Rorty, *Achieving our Country*, p.11

<sup>iv</sup> This brief analysis has only considered transportation and (in)equality for the present. A lengthier examination should consider the environmental consequences of endorsing individual auto use as a constraint on liberty and equality for future generations.

<sup>v</sup> Naomi Klein discusses the “brand revolution” in her book *No Logos*.

<sup>vi</sup> Since June 19<sup>th</sup>, I have received 46 emails from the Obama Campaign begging that I invest money in America by donating to their campaign. A collection of favorites can be found in the appendix.

<sup>vii</sup> President Obama’s online “store” features a list of collections, apparel, accessories, and even home & outdoor products: <https://store.barackobama.com/>

<sup>viii</sup> For a full list of policy platforms see Appendix.

<sup>ix</sup> These numbers were calculated by [opensecrets.org](http://www.opensecrets.org) and can be found at <http://www.opensecrets.org/bigpicture/index.php>.

<sup>x</sup> Williamson quotes Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*

<sup>xi</sup> quote taken from Aristotle’s *Politics*, Book 2 pg 80.

<sup>xii</sup> Rousseau warns against the use of representatives in *On the Social Contract* p.242.

<sup>xiii</sup> We could call this the Kardashianification of identity.

<sup>xiv</sup> The vacancy number is taken from an article on [Bloomberg.com](http://www.bloomberg.com) by John Gittelsohn : <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-04-30/homeownership-rate-in-u-s-falls-to-lowest-since-1997.html>; while the statistic on homelessness was published in “The State of Homelessness in America 2012” a research report conducted by the Homelessness Research Institute and can be found at: <http://msnbcmedia.msn.com/i/MSNBC/Sections/NEWS/z-pdf-archive/homeless.pdf>